THE HUDSON REVIEW

Volume I, Number 2 • Summer, 1948

The Imagery of Killing	KENNETH BURKE	151
Three Poems	HERBERT READ	168
A Burden for Critics	R. P. BLACKMUR	170
Three Poems	DONALD F. DRUMMOND	186
Action as Rational: Racine's Bérénice	FRANCIS FERGUSSON	188
Two Poems	HOWARD NEMEROV	204
Reflections on Style	JOHN PEALE BISHOP	207
Leda	W. WESLEY TRIMPI	221
Notes on Faulkner and Flaubert	CAROLINE GORDON	222
Oklahoma	JAMES LOVETT	232
To Morfudd	GWYN WILLIAMS	232
The White Hound	WARD DORRANCE	234
Five Poems	JOSEPH D. BENNETT	249
Letter from Paris	ROBERT DE SAINT JEAN	253
A Note on the Theatre	FRANCIS MASON	256

REVIEWS

Recent Verse	FREDERICK MORGAN	258
The Making of Poetry	W. B. C. WATKINS	267
Tradition and the Academic Talent	H. M. MCLUHAN	270
The Apostolic Fathers	JOHN RAWLS	274
Recent Fiction	JOSEPH FRANK	276

EDITORS:

William Arrowsmith, Joseph D. Bennett, Frederick Morgan

ASSOCIATES:

Cornelia Claiborne, Mary Sharp, Ellen Violett, Robert Wise

THE HUDSON REVIEW is published quarterly by The Hudson Review, Inc., 39 West 11th St., New York 11, N. Y. Subscriptions $3 per year; Canada $3.50; foreign $4. Single copy $1; in Canada, $1.15. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. Copyright 1948 by The Hudson Review, Inc. Registered U. S. Patent Office. Application for entry as second-class matter is pending.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Imagery of Killing

KENNETH BURKE

AN OLD POET, libertarian and regicide, blind, fallen on evil days, in sullen warlike verse celebrates Samson. On its face, his poem tells of Samson among the Philistines. A prisoner chained "eyeless in Gaza" . . . "blind among enemies" because he could not keep "the secret of his strength" . . . himself his "sepulchre" . . . himself his own "dungeon" . . . his sightlessness in captivity a "prison within prison" . . . enraged with himself for having

divulged
The secret gift of God to a deceitful
Woman,

for having given up his "fort of silence to a woman," he hugely laments his "corporal servitude." He talks of patience, and mouths threats of revenge in the name of God. And finally, when brought to the pagan temple, standing between "those two massy pillars,/That to the arched roof gave main support," "by his own hands," in "self-violence" ("O lastly over-strong against thyself!" . . . "Among thy slain self-killed" . . .), he sufferingly acts:

As with the force of winds and waters pent
When mountains tremble, those two massy pillars
With horrible convulsion to and fro
He tugged, he shook, till down they came, and drew
The whole roof after them with burst of thunder
Upon the heads of all who sat beneath,
Lords, ladies, captains, counsellors, or priests,
Their choice nobility and flower, not only
Of this, but each Philistian city round,
Met from all parts to solemnize this feast.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Samson, with these inmixed, inevitably
Pulled down the same destruction on himself;
The vulgar only scaped, who stood without.

And at this act, or sufferance, a notable transformation has taken place. We learn that the enemy, "drunk with idolatry, drunk with wine," had been led by the wrath of Samson's God to bring on "their own destruction." For they were "with blindness internal struck." But Samson had been "with inward eyes illuminated." They are the sightless, he is the seer, and

. . . as an eagle
His cloudless thunder bolted on their heads.

The vanquished enemy, by comparison, were but "tame villatic fowl." More than twenty years before, in the *Areopagitica* ("A Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing, to the Parliament of England"), his great verbal monument that gives dignity and resonance and ultimate grounding to the doctrine of the free press, a related reference to the eagle appeared:

> *Methinks I see in my mind's eye a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks. Methinks I see her as an eagle mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam; purging and unscaling her long-abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance; while the whole noise of timorous and flocking birds, with those also that love the twilight, flutter about, amazed at what she means, and in their envious gabble would prognosticate a year of sects and schisms.*

The prose reference is clearly rhetorical. It occurs in a work written with a definite audience in mind, and for a definite purpose. It was literature for *use*. Today, it would be called "propaganda."

But what of the poem? One can read it simply *in itself*, without even considering the fact that it was written by Milton. It can be studied and appreciated as a structure of internally related parts, without concern for the correspondence that almost inevitably suggests itself: the correspondence between Milton's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

blindness and Samson's, or between the poet's difficulties with his first wife and Dalila's betrayal of a divine "secret."

Besides this individual identification of the author with an aggressive, self-destructive hero who was in turn identified with God, there is also factional identification. Samson has said:

> *All the contest is now*
> *'Twixt God and Dagon. Dagon hath presumed,*
> *Me overthrown, to enter lists with God,*
> *His deity comparing and preferring*
> *Before the God of Abraham.*

And this exalting of the issue, in terms of rival divinities at war, is allusive: the Philistines and Dagon implicitly standing for the Royalists, "drunk with wine," who have regained power in England, while the Israelites stand for the Puritan faction of Cromwell. The poem's righteous ferocity is no mere evidence of a virtuoso's craftsmanship; it is not sheer poetic exercise, as with a versatile playwright able to imagine whatever kind of role the exigencies of plot happened to require.

Rather, it is almost a kind of witchcraft, a wonder-working spell by a cantankerous old fighter-priest who would slay the enemy in effigy, and whose very translation of political controversy to high theologic terms helps, by such magnification, to sanction the ill-tempered obstinacy of his resistance. In saying, with fervor, that a blind Biblical hero *did* conquer, the poet is "substantially" saying that he in his blindness *will* conquer. This is moralistic prophecy, and is thus also a kind of "literature for use," use at one remove, though of a sort that the technologically-minded would consider the very opposite of use, since it is wholly in the order of ritual and magic.

II

Note another result here: The recurring stress upon the *reflexive* nature of Samson's act (the element of self-destruction in his way of slaying the enemy) can be a roundabout device for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sanctioning suicide; yet Milton's religion strongly forbade suicide. Compelled by his misfortune to live with his rage, gnawed by resentments that he could no longer release fully in outward contest, Milton found in Samson a figure ambivalently fit to symbolize both aggressive and in-turning trends. Here too, though still more remotely, would be "literature for use": the poetic reënactment of Samson's role could give pretexts for admitting a motive which, if not so clothed or complicated, if confronted in its simplicity, would have been inadmissible. By dramatic subterfuge Milton could include what he would have had to exclude, if reduced to a conceptually analytic statement.

The dramatic terms provide a rich context that greatly modifies whatever modicum of suicide may be present in the motivational formula as a whole. But all such important modifications, or qualifications, are dropped when we reduce the complexity to one essential strand, slant, or "gist," isolating this one reflexive element as the implicitly dominant motive, an all pervasive generating principle. And these qualifications which the reduction would omit are strategic enough to make the motivations quite different from an out-and-out featuring of suicide as cause, in a poem stressing the theme directly, efficiently, without the modifiers of Milton's context. By comparison with such a poem, Milton's meaning would not be a recipe for suicide at all, having but a mere dash, or soupçon, of such an ingredient.

We do not mean to suggest that the figure of Samson in Milton's poem is to be interpreted purely as a "rationalization," in the psychoanalytic sense. We are taking the poem at its face value. If two statements, for instance, one humorous and the other humorless, are found to contain the same animus against someone, we are not thereby justified in treating them as the same in their motivational core. For the humorless statement may *foretell* homicide, and the humorous one may be the very thing that *forestalls* homicide. Thus *surrounded*, or modified by the total motivational context, the animus in one case may be as different from the other as yes from no. Indeed, the humorous motivation could lead to intentional homicide only insofar as it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were reduced, with the qualifications of humor dropped from it. It could not, as *humor*, lead to this result, however "homicidal" might be the imagery in which it was expressed. For this imagery, *so long as it was humorous*, would contain a dimension which essentially qualified the animus. And such imagery could "foretell" homicide only in the sense that it contained an ingredient which, if efficiently abstracted from its humorous modifiers, would be in its new purity homicidal. And such abstracting can take place, of course, whenever conditions place too much of a strain upon the capacity for humor.

Similarly, a motive introduced in one work where the context greatly modifies it and keeps it from being drastically itself, may lack such important modifications in the context of another work. The *proportions* of these modifications themselves are essential in defining the total motivation, which cannot, without misinterpretation, be reduced merely to the one "gist," with all the rest taken as mere concealment or "rationalization" of it. And in this sense, we would take the motivation of Milton's poem at its face, considering the aggressive and theocratic terms just as significant in the total recipe as the reflexive terms are. Whether there are gods or not, there is an *objective* difference in motivation between an act conceived in the name of God and an act conceived in the name of godless Nature.

Contrast the imagery of self-immolation in Matthew Arnold's "Empedocles on Etna," for instance. Thinking of himself "as an orphan among prosperous boys"; complaining that "we feel, day and night,/ The burden of ourselves"; introspective ("Sink in thyself!"); renouncing ("thou hast no *right* to bliss,/ No title from the gods to welfare and repose"); non-aggressively nostalgic ("Receive me, hide me, quench me, take me home!"); weary of both solitude and multitude ("thou fencest him from the multitude—/ Who will fence him from himself?"); yearning to descend "Down in our mother earth's miraculous womb"—Empedocles sees promise of freedom as he "plunges into the center," a self-immolation that unites him idealistically with mountain, sea, stars, and air, while the volcano itself, into which he had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hurled himself, is also by legend the prison of a buried titan, a "self-helping son of earth" who had been "oppress'd" by the "well-counsell'd Zeus."

When matched with so clear an imagery of suicide, one could make out a good case for denying that Milton's identification with the "self-slain" Samson has any ingredient of suicide at all. Yet how do things look if we insert another step here? Though Arnold himself came to distrust his poem of Empedocles, and even suppressed its publication, much the same motives are discernible in his narrative of "Sohrab and Rustum," where the two warriors fight in single combat without knowing that they are father and son, and the son receives his death wound when paralyzed at the sound of his father's name; thus:

When Rustum raised his head; his dreadful eyes
Glared, and he shook on high his menacing spear,
And shouted: Rustum!—*Sohrab heard that shout,*
And shrank amazed; back he recoil'd one step,
And scann'd with blinking eyes the advancing form;
And then he stood bewilder'd; and he dropp'd
His covering shield, and the spear pierced his side.
He reel'd, and staggering back, sank to the ground,
And then the gloom dispersed, and the wind fell,
And the bright sun broke forth, and melted all
The cloud; and the two armies saw the pair—
Saw Rustum standing, safe upon his feet,
And Sohrab, wounded, on the bloody sand.

Following the recognition, and the son's death, there is even the same cosmically unifying end as with Empedocles' self-immolating plunge into the crater. But here the action is transferred from the personae to sympathetic nature (from agents to similarly motivated scene, itself a new and transcendent order of action). As "Rustum and his son were left alone" by the river marge, "the majestic river floated on," a solemn course, charted by the poem through many lines.

till at last
The long'd for dash of waves is heard, and wide

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His luminous home of waters opens, bright
And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bathed stars
Emerge, and shine upon the Aral Sea.

Here, the son having been killed by the father, through the progress of the river to the sea he plunges by proxy into the universal home. And graced by the son's sacrifice, the armies are at peace.

Our knowledge of Matthew Arnold's relation to his father suggests an extra-literary "use" for the imagery of self-effacement in both these poems. Despite their many differences, both are acts of the same poetic agent, sharing the common substance of the one authorship. And both can be seen as aspects of the same attitude towards life. Indeed, when we put them together, we note this possibility: that Arnold could poetically identify himself with the figure of Empedocles because his pious deference to the authority of his father could be aptly expressed in such imagery of self-effacement as goes with Empedocles' cosmically motivated despair. And this self-abnegatory attitude, being in the same motivational cluster with his attitude towards his father, could find still more accurate expression in the imagery of a son "unconsciously" killed by his father, and *in the name of* his father.

Seen from this point of view, the "gist" of "Sohrab and Rustum" would be as "suicidal" as "Empedocles on Etna," where this theme is *explicitly* there. It would be "implicit" in "Sohrab and Rustum" because, for all the imagery of war surrounding the combat between father and son, it all "adds up" or "boils down" to a son's fatal admiration for his father. The poet, in both cases, imagines that the figure with whom he identifies himself is *being killed;* and in both cases the destruction terminates in imagery of a home-coming, a return to sources probably maternal.

Just what are we getting at here? We have tried to see how matters look if we put a transitional step between "Empedocles on Etna" and *Samson Agonistes.* Since Samson is self-killed in a warlike act that kills the enemy, we tried to match him against

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

two figures by a later poet in the same "curve of history." The first figure (Empedocles) is killed by suicide; the second (Sohrab) is killed by war. But by putting Empedocles and Sohrab together, as variants of one attitude in the one poetic agent who had identified himself with both figures, we tried to establish the common character of both a suicide and a warlike death. Then, looking back at the poem by Milton, we find there, united in one poem, what Arnold has divided between two poems: the suicide and the warlike death are united in the same image.

See what our problem is. We seem to be going two ways at once. In some respects, we are trying to bring these poems together as instances of the *same* motivation; yet in other respects we are insisting that the unique context in which this motive appears in each poem makes the motive itself *different* in all three cases. Can we keep our line of thinking clear here, for the reader? Milton's theocratic rage, for instance, is "warlike" in a much different way from the combats in "Sohrab and Rustum." Modifying this warrior, whose death was caused by the sound of his father's name, there are some significantly unwarlike images. Thus when Rustum, gazing in desolation at the wounded Sohrab,

> *saw that Youth,*
> *Of age and looks to be his own dear son,*
> *Piteous and lovely, lying on the sand,*
> *Like some rich hyacinth which by the scythe*
> *Of an unskilful gardener has been cut,*
> *Mowing the garden grass-plots near its bed,*
> *And lies, a fragrant tower of purple bloom,*
> *On the mown, dying grass—so Sohrab lay,*
> *Lovely in death, upon the common sand.*

And when Sohrab finally draws the spear, to ease "His wound's imperious anguish,"

> *all down his cold, white side*
> *The crimson torrent ran, dim now and soil'd,*
> *Like the soil'd tissue of white violets*
> *Left, freshly gather'd, on the native bank,*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

By children whom their nurses call with haste
Indoors from the sun's eye . . .

Such unwarlike modifiers radically modify the motive of war here, quite as the motive of self-destruction which we saw clearly stated in "Empedocles on Etna" is modified by the dramatic irony whereby the son is sacrificed in the name of the father. And as contrasted with the righteous fury of Milton, we see how Arnold's attitudes were more closely akin, rather, to the *next* step in the curve of literary history; we see how they led into the estheticism of Pater, and thence to father-problems as transformed perversely in the estheticism of Oscar Wilde.

By adding one more confusion, we may add the element that can bring clarity. This time, from the same "curve of history," from Coleridge's "Religious Musings":

. . . in His vast family no Cain
Injures uninjured (in her best-aimed blow
Victorious Murder a blind Suicide).

This statement suggests a point at which murder and suicide can become convertible, each in its way an image for the same motive. The quotation is not quite analogous to the three other poems, since it is from a *doctrinal* poem (one of what Coleridge called his Conversation Pieces, "*sermoni propriora*"). But although it lacks the dramatic modifiers that complicate the motivation in the other poems, it avoids over-efficient reduction to "gist" at least in the sense that it is dialectical, ironically making motives interchangeable which might usually be considered mutually exclusive. Indeed, the terms being equivalent, we might just as well read them backwards: "blind Suicide a Victorious Murder." Then we might think either of a poem which symbolized suicide by imagery of murder, or one which symbolized murder by imagery of suicide. And when you get to that point, you need one more step to complete your thinking: You need to look for a *motive that can serve as ground for both these choices,* a motive that, while not being exactly either one or the other, can ambiguously contain them both.

A term serving as ground for both these terms would, by the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

same token, "transcend" them. The battlefield, for instance, which permits rival contestants to join in battle, itself "transcends" their factionalism, being "superior" to it, and being "neutral" to their motives, though the conditions of the terrain may happen to favor one faction. The *principles* of war are not themselves warlike, and are ultimately reducible to universal principles of physics and dialectic. Similarly, a poet's identification with imagery of murder or suicide, either one or the other, is, from the "neutral" point of view, merely a concern with *terms for transformation in general.*

When we consider the resources of dialectic so broadly, of course, we necessarily disregard the animus of any particular image. This would be a very wrong thing to do, when some specific set of transformations is to be analyzed. But when considering transformation in general, we should proceed otherwise, noting rather the respects in which many different kinds of image can perform the same function. One may prefer imagery of the Upward Way and Downward Way, or of the Crossing and Return, or of Exile and Homecoming, or of a Winding-up and an Unwinding, or of Egressus and Regressus, or of Movement Inward and a Movement Outward, or of seasonal developments, or of various antitheses, like Day and Night, Warmth and Frigidity, Yes and No, Losing and Finding, Loosing and Linking, etc., merely to be placed statically against each other, but in given poetic forms they usually represent a development *from* one order of motives *to* another. Such terms, here selected at random, suggest different families of images in terms of which the processes of transformation in general might be localized, or particularized.

And high among them, naturally, is the imagery of Life and Death, with its variants of being born, being reborn, dying, killing, and being killed. Consider, now, the hypothetical case of a poet who would identify himself with some particular imagery of transformation selected from this order of terms, terms using the imagery of Life and Death. We can easily conceive of a poet who, wanting to symbolize the transformation of some evil trait

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

within himself, writes a poem accordingly; and in this poem he identifies himself with a figure who, marked by this trait, took his own life, thereby ritualistically transforming the trait. Or another might symbolize this same transformation by imaginatively endowing some "outward enemy" with the trait, and then imaginatively slaying that enemy. Or a third poet might identify himself with a figure who possessed that trait, and then might imagine an enemy who slew his poetic counterpart. The trait, whatever its stylistic transformation (magnification, purification, martyrdom, etc.), may not even be "slain" by an "alien" principle at all, so far as the original poet was concerned; the contest may most likely symbolize the pitting of one motivational principle against another where *both* principles are strongly characteristic of the poet personally. (Think, for instance, of the "murderous" relation between the critical and poetic "selves" of T. S. Eliot, as symbolized in his *Murder in the Cathedral,* and previously discussed in our *Attitudes Towards History.*) Similarly, if a principle were located in the figure of mother, father, child, tyrant, or king, and were ritually transformed under these guises, we should have respectively: matricide, patricide, infanticide, tyrannicide, or regicide. The Nazis, locating the *transformandum* in the whole Jewish people as their chosen vessel, gave us a "scientific" variant: genocide. And the frequent psychoanalytic search for "unconscious" desires to kill some member of the family, either through rivalry or through love frustrated and expressed in reverse, puts the emphasis at the wrong place. For the so-called "desire to kill" a certain person is much more properly analyzable as a desire to transform the *principle* which that person *represents.*

Since imagery built about the active, reflexive, and passive forms of death (killing, self-killing, and being killed) so obviously contributes to dramatic intensity, and since thoughts of death are so basic to human motivation, we usually look no farther to account for their use. But there is also an ultimate "Grammatical" incentive behind such imagery, since a history's *end* is a formal way of proclaiming its *essence* or *nature* as with those

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

who distinguish between a tragedy and a comedy by the outcome alone and who would transform "tragedy" into "comedy" merely by changing the last few moments of the last act.

Elsewhere (notably on "the temporizing of essense," *Grammar of Motives,* pp. 430-440) we have discussed the puns of logical and temporal priority whereby the *logical* idea of a thing's essence can be translated into a temporal or narrative equivalent by statement in terms of the thing's source or beginnings (as feudal thinking characterized a person's individual identity in terms that identified him with his family, the paradoxical ultimate of such definition being perhaps the use of "bastard" as epithet to describe a man's *character*). But if there is this ultimate of *beginnings,* whereby theological or metaphysical systems may state the essence of mankind in terms of a divine parenthood or an originating natural ground, there is also an ultimate of *endings,* whereby the essence of a thing can be defined narratively in terms of its *fulfilment* or *fruition*.. Thus, you state a man's timeless essence in temporal terms if, instead of calling him "by nature a criminal," you say, "he will end on the gallows."

Metaphysically, this formal principle gets its best-rounded expression in the Aristotelian *entelechy,* which classifies a thing by conceiving of its kind according to the perfection (that is, finished-ness) of which that kind is capable. Man is a "rational animal," for instance, not in the sense that he is immune to irrational motives, but in the sense that the perfection of humankind is in the order of rationality (an order of finished-ness which one would not apply to things incapable of Logos, the Word).

Such thinking was probably itself a translation of narrative terms into "timeless" ones (as the Homeric ways of essentializing in terms of act and image eventually became transformed into the high generalizations of philosophy). But once we have a mature set of such abstract fixities (which are "fixities" in the sense that the "laws" or "principles" of motion do not themselves move, if they are stated abstractly enough), we can turn the matter around; and thus, whereas the philosophic expressions were later translations of the earlier narrative ones, we may look upon

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

narrative expressions as translations of philosophic ones. By such heuristic reversal, we note how the imagery of death could be a narrative equivalent of the Aristotelian entelechy. For the poet could define the essence of a motive narratively or dramatically (in terms of a *history*) by showing how that motive *ended*: the maturity or fulfilment of a motive, its "perfection" or "finishedness," if translated into the terms of tragic outcome, would entail the identifying of that motive with a narrative figure whose acts led to some fitting form of *death*. By its fruition, we should judge it. In this respect, the Christian injunction to lead the "dying life" is itself a formula that translates the Aristotelian entelechy into its tragic equivalent; for in both the speculative and the tragic expressions, there is the same underlying Grammatical principle, the defining of an essence in terms of the *end* (the *perfection* being by the same token *death*, quite as the attaining of a given end marks the death of such efforts as went with the attaining of that end). The relations among our words, "define," "determine," "termination," suggest the same ambiguities and possibilities of conversion. Taking a hint from the English translation of Richard Strauss's tone poem, *Death and Transfiguration*, we might say that the tragic dignifying of a motive is got by identifying it with death *as* transfiguration.

In sum: When considering "the temporizing of essence" in the *Grammar*, we were both put on the trail and misled somewhat by the suggestions in the word "prior." Following its leads, we saw how the search for "logical" priority can, when translated into temporal, or narrative terms, be expressed in the imagery of "regression to childhood," or in other imagery or ideas of things past. This concern with the statement of essence in terms of *origins* (ancestry) caused us to overlook the exactly opposite resource, the statement of essence in terms of *culminations* (where the narrative notion of "how it all ends up" does serve for the logically reductive notion of "what it all boils down to"). In either choice (the ancestral or the final) the narrative terminology provides for a *personalizing* of essence. Along similar lines we may note that the imagery of adult illness (*e.g.* Mann's use

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the tuberculosis sanitarium in *Tristan* and *The Magic Mountain*) may serve particularly well as a narrative terminology of essence in that it combines both "regressive" and "culminative" principles of identification. Or the adult patients, in being constantly nursed and cared for, are in a condition that harks back to the "priority" of childhood, and at the same time they are tragically under the culminative sign of death.

So universally felt is the Grammatical principle behind the defining of essence in terms of death, or tragic end, that in our pseudo-scientific days, when the cult of questionnaires has developed its own peculiar unction, perhaps one might come closer to an accurate classifying of "personality types" if he worked out a system of "tragic" categories. Surely, for instance, the person who chooses to end his life by violence thereby distinguishes himself from those late Romans who preferred cutting their veins and bleeding to death in a warm bath. And the end of Milton's Samson differs from the end of Arnold's Empedocles quite as Milton differs from Arnold.

But perhaps to get the most generalized approach to such classification, while still keeping it in the *narrative* terminology of definition, our hypothetical Neo-Tragic Categorist should greatly broaden the question of human endings. He should hire a batch of poets; and instead of putting them to work, as is usually the case now, on the avid imagining of reasons why our citizenry should intensely yearn for all sorts of manufactured and "processed" things (a narrow but unending succession of ends) he should commission them to fully realize, for the average middle-class audience, all the different ways in which, it is thought, the world itself might end. Surely, it would not take much to distinguish between the character of a person who foresaw a world ending "not with a bang but a whimper," and one who feared some mighty holocaust, as were the planets ripped into smithereens by explosions from within. Or contrast the mediaeval imagery of the mighty burning with many modern scientists' pale preference for the "heat death" according to the principle of in-turning, or entropy, whereby the earlier potency of matter

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

must finally dwindle into a universal, uniform impotence. Those who thought of a lethal gas that, wandering through space, stealthily enveloped the earth would be quite different from those obsessed by thoughts of huge astral collisions, or from those who worried lest our sun suddenly burst forth as a Nova, so intense in its new activity that even Neptune and Pluto would be scorched. People would here spontaneously classify themselves; for by reason of the scene-agent ratio whereby the individual can identify himself with the character of a surrounding situation, translating one into terms of the other, a shift to a grander order, the shift from thoughts of one's own individual end to thoughts of a universal end, would still contrive to portray the character of the individual, even while acquiring greater resonance and scope and enabling men to transcend too local a view of themselves.

Perhaps our plans here are too ambitious. We can at least claim, as remote members of our "Neo-Tragic" school of ethnic classification, certain modern biologists who propose to classify plant species according to differences in response to various kinds of mutilation (though such science perhaps has a trace of that purely *sadistic* motive which usually obscures our understanding of tragedy itself today).

True, while noting that the imagery of killing is analyzable as one particular order of terms figuring processes of transformation in general, we do not overlook the genius of the imagery as such. Taken simply at face value, it invites us to respond in accordance with its nature. Thus, an adolescent, eager to "grow up," is trained by our motion pictures to meditate much on the imagery of brutality and murder, as the most noteworthy signs of action in an ideal or imaginary adult world. By the time he is fifteen, he has "witnessed" more violence than most soldiers or gunmen experience in a lifetime. And he has "participated in" all this imagery, "emphatically reënacting" it. Thus initiated, he might well think of "growing up" (that is, of "transformation") in such excessive terms. His awareness of himself as a developing person requires a vocabulary—and the images of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brutality and violence provide such a vocabulary, with a simple recipe for the perfecting or empowering of the self by the punishing and slaying of troublesome motives as though they were wholly external. One can surely expect such imagery to have sinister effects, particularly in view of the fact that the excessive *naturalism* of modern photographic art presents the violence, as nearly as possible, without formal devices that bring out the purely *artistic* or *fictive* nature of such art. There is no difference, in photographic style, between the filming of murder mystery and the filming of a "documentary." And we are not in the least denying the possible bad effect of the many devices whereby such brutality is made "virtuous," through dramatic pretexts that justify it in terms of retaliation and righteous indignation.

Our objections arise when certain kinds of speculation (often of psychoanalytic cast) unwittingly exemplify these same sinister trends. By itself stressing the primacy of vengeance and slaughter as motives (and looking upon friendly or ethical motives purely as a kind of benign fiction for harnessing these more nearly "essential" impulses), such thought is really more like the *forerunner* of modern militarism than its *critic*. And often they will show such zeal, in behalf of "killing" as the essential motive, that they will seek all sorts of ingenious ways of showing that a work was motivated by the desire to slay some parental figure who suffered no such fate at all, in the imagery of the plot as interpreted on its face. They apparently assume that to show "Unconscious" matricidal implications in a motive is by the same token to establish matricide as *the* motive. If a play is explicitly about patricide or matricide, one might feel some justification in complaining if we would see behind it merely the choice of a material symbol to represent some motivational principle not intrinsically maternal at all, but using material identifications as "imagined accidents" that personify it. But whatever may be the objections in such cases, they would not apply at all in cases where there is no explicit imagery of matricide, and one must by exegesis hunt matricide as motive. Why, one may then ask, must an imagery

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of "matricide" be taken as essential, as primary, as the true designation of the ultimate motive? And we, of course, would similarly ask: why must *any* imagery of killing, even when explicit, be taken as ultimate, rather than as an "opportunistic" terminology for specifying or localizing a principle of motivation "prior" to *any imagery,* either scenic or personal?

That is, we can recognize that our anecdote is in the order of killing, of personal enmity, of factional strife, of invective, polemic, eristic, Logomachy, all of them aspects of Rhetoric that we are repeatedly and drastically encountering, since Rhetoric is par excellence the region of the Scramble, of insult and injury, bickering, squabbling, malice and the lie, cloaked malice and the subsidized lie. Yet while admitting that the genius of our opening anecdote has malign inclinations, we can, without forcing, find benign elements there too. And we should, since Rhetoric also includes resources of appeal ranging from sacrificial, evangelical love, through the kinds of persuasion figuring in sexual love, to sheer "neutral" *communication,* communication being the area where love has become so generalized, desexualized, "technologized," that only close critical or philosophic scrutiny can discern the vestiges of the original motive.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sonnet

One day you will intuitively come
Home again driving westward
Into the burning sun memory
A dusty screen that blinds the vision
You will wind through the narrow lanes
Over the frequent culverts where willows
Sprout in clumps The marshes
Remember the marigolds and over the farm
The pines stretch agonised arms
It will be still and you will descend
Into an arena of yellow corn
That not a breath of wind stirs
And a rook if it should swerve in the sky
Will move the whole world momentously

The Well of Life

The waters of the well of life
Lie deep on a rocky bed:
They are not fetched from running streams
But drawn at the well-head.

The red-haired wives stand there
(Each has a lover)
One turns the wailing windlass
The other bends over

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And dips a scoop into the well
To fill the pitcher at her side:
The clouds are ghostly passengers
That on the stilled water ride.

The rooks are croaking in the elms
And men in the field labour.
God will bless the wives and their strong
Men's endeavour.

Mycene

I have seen Time's filial beast
To make his mockery of life
Plant the pale cyclamen aridly—here
Where the nosing goat
Presses an indifferent hoof . . .
I would have spoken thus
And thus have told you: Pride has no power
To sever such a tangled knot
As gathers within the blue stain
Of eyes that might be trembling waters
Were lust to be provoked. I saw you then
Iphigenia or some legendary girl
Crouched over a fire of withered thyme
In Agamemnon's tomb. The flames
Were brief, and left a darkness
Deeper than night—into which we walked
Strangers, to a separate doom.

—HERBERT READ

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Burden for Critics

R. P. BLACKMUR

WHEN GEORGE SANTAYANA MADE HIS APOLOGY for writing a system of philosophy—one more after so many, one more after a lifetime of self-denial—he put his plea for forgiveness on the ground that he was an ignorant man, almost a poet. No doubt there was some reservation in Santayana's mind when he made that plea; no doubt there is some in mine when I adapt it to myself. This essay does not introduce a system of criticism; it is only a plea that criticism take up some of its possibilities that have been in abeyance, or in corruption, for some time; and it may be that like Santayana's philosophy it will look like an approach to a system. If so, it is the system of an ignorant man, and there is nothing in it that does not remind itself at every turn that it is the kind of ignorance which goes with being almost a poet. Poetry is one of the things we do to our ignorance; criticism makes us conscious of what we have done, and sometimes makes us conscious of what can be done next, or done again.

That consciousness is the way we feel the critic's burden. By a burden, I mean both a weight and a refrain, something we carry and something that carries us along, something we have in possession and something that reminds us what we are. It is the burden of our momentum. In relation to it we get work done. Out of relation to it we get nothing done, except so far as we are swept along; and of course we are mainly swept along. The critic's job is to put us into maximum relation to the burden of our momentum, which means he has to run the risk of a greater degree of consciousness than his mind is fit for. He risks substituting the formulas of relation for the things related. I take it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the critic is a relativist; but his relativism does not need to be either deterministic or positivistic, as in our time it usually is; he may rather be the relativist of insight, aspiration, vision. He is concerned with choice, not prescription, with equity, not law; never with the dead hand, always with the vital purpose. He knows that the institution of literature, so far as it is alive, is made again at every instant. It is made afresh as part of the process of being known afresh; what is permanent is what is always fresh, and it can be fresh only in performance—that is, in reading and seeing and hearing what is actually in it at this place and this time. It is in performance that we find out relation to momentum. Or put another way, the critic brings to consciousness the means of performance.

Perform is a word of which we forget the singular beauty. Its meaning is: to furnish forth, to complete, to finish, in a sense which is influenced by the ideas clustered in the word *form;* so that *performance* is an enlightening name for one of our richest activities, rich with extra life. If it is the characteristic intent of the critic to see about the conditions of performance, it is his characteristic temptation to interfere with those conditions. He will find substitutes; he will make one condition do for every condition; he will make precedent do for balance, or rote for authority; and, worst of all, he will impose the excellence of something he understands upon something he does not understand. Then all the richness of actual performance is gone. It is worth taking precautions to prevent that loss, or at any rate to keep us aware of the risk.

The precautions of the past come down to us as mottoes; and for the critic of literature in our time I would suggest three mottoes—all Latin—as exemplary. *Omnis intellectus omniformis est*: every mind is omniform, every mind has latent in it all possible forms of the mind, even one's own mind. The temptation is to make some single form of the mind seem omnicompetent; omnicompetence becomes omniscience and asserts for itself closed authority based upon a final revelation. *Omnis intellectus omniformis est.* This is a motto of the Renaissance, and leads us directly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to a motto of the high Middle Ages, which preceded, or initiated, rather than followed, an era of absolute authority: *Fides quaerens intellectus.* If the temptation of the Renaissance was to put one's own version of the mind in first place, the temptation of the Middle Ages was to identify God with either one's own knowledge of him or with one's particular form of faith. *Fides quaerens intellectus* is a motto meant to redeem that temptation; for it is faith alone that may question the intellect, as it is only the intellect that can curb faith. The very principle of balance, together with the radical precariousness of its nature, lies in the reversibility of this motto. Just so, the value of both these mottoes is heightened by putting them into relation with a third, which is classical in its time, and which has to do primarily neither with intellect nor faith but with the temptation of the moral sensibility. *Corruptio optima pessima*: in corruption the best is the worst. Here, in this motto, is that hard core of common sense—Cochrane's phrase—of which the Christian world has never got enough in its heritage from classical culture. It reminds the moral ego of its fatal temptation to forget that the ground it stands on is not its own, but other, various, and equal. Surely we have made the best in us the worst when we have either pushed an insight beyond its field or refused, when using one insight, to acknowledge the pressure of all those insights—those visions of value—with which it is in conflict. If we do not see this, we have lost the feeling of richness, the sense of relation, and the power of judgment; and without these we cannot, as conscious critics, bring our experience of literature to actual performance. We should know neither what to bring, nor what to look for.

All this is generality; it applies to literature chiefly in the sense that literature is one aspect among many of the general human enterprise. The horror, for critics, of most aspects of that enterprise, is that they are exigent in action and will by no means stand still for criticism until they are done for. The beauty of literature is that it is exigent in the mind and will not only stand still but indeed never comes fully into its life of symbolic action until criticism has taken up the burden of bringing it into per-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

formance and finding its relation to the momentum of the whole enterprise. Both what constitutes performance and the very nature of relation—that is to say, what must be done and what may be taken for granted—change from time to time. It seems likely that one reason there has been so little great literature is that at most times so little has been required of it: how often has a Virgil felt obligated to create the myth of imperial culture? It is even more likely that the ability to cope with the task was wanting when required: how often has a Dante turned up to put into actual order all that had been running into the disorder of the rigid intellect and the arbitrary will? Ordinarily, past times have required little of literature in the way either of creating or ordering a culture. The artist's task was principally to express the continuity of his culture and the turbulence that underlay it. That is perhaps why we find the history of criticism so much concerned with matters of decorum: that is to say, with conformity, elegance, rhetoric, or metrics: matters not now commonly found or considered in the reviews. In our own time—if I may be permitted the exaggerations of ignorance and of poetry—almost everything is required of the arts and particularly of literature. Almost the whole job of culture, as it has formerly been understood, has been dumped into the hands of the writer. Possibly a new form of culture, appropriate to a massive urban society, is emerging: at any rate there are writers who write with a new ignorance and a new collective illiteracy: I mean the Luce papers and Hollywood. But the old drives persist. Those who seem to be the chief writers of our time have found their subjects in attempting to dramatize at once both the culture and the turbulence it was meant to control, and in doing so they have had practically to create—as it happens, to re-create—the terms, the very symbolic substance, of the culture as they went along.

I do not mean that this has happened by arrogation on the part of the writers; I mean they have been left alone with this subject as part of the actual experience of life in our time: which is always the subject which importunes every serious writer if he is honest and can keep himself free of the grosser hallucina-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tions. The actual is always the medium through which the visitation of the Muse is felt. Perhaps a distinction will clarify what is meant. It is getting on towards a century since Matthew Arnold suggested that poetry could perhaps take over the expressive functions of religion. Possibly Arnold only meant the functions of the Church of England and the lesser dissenting sects. Whatever he meant, it did not happen, it could not and it cannot happen. All poetry can do is to dramatize, to express, what has actually happened to religion. This it has done. It has not replaced or in any way taken over the functions of religion; but it has been compelled to replace the operative force of religion as a resource with the discovery, or creation, of religion as an aesthetic experience. The poet has to put his religion itself into his poetry along with his experience of it. Think, together, of the religious poetry of George Herbert and of T. S. Eliot: of how little Herbert had to do before he got to his poetry, of how much Eliot is compelled to put into his poetry before he is free to write it. Consider too—and perhaps this is more emphatic of what has happened—the enormous mass of exegetical criticism it has seemed necessary and desirable to apply to Eliot's poetry and indeed to the whole school of Donne. This criticism neither compares, nor judges; it elucidates scripture.

Let us put the matter as a question. Why do we treat poetry, and gain by doing so, after much the same fashion as Augustine treated the scriptures in the Fifth Century? Why do we make of our criticism an essay in the understanding of words and bend upon that essay exclusively every tool of insight and analysis we possess? Why do we have to re-create so much of the poem in the simple reading which is only the preface to total performance? Do we, like Augustine, live in an interregnum, after a certainty, anticipating a synthesis? If so, unlike Augustine, we lack a special revelation: we take what we can find, and what we find is that art is, as Augustine sometimes thought, a human increment to creation. If this is so, how, then, has it come about?

We know very well how it has come about, and we come late enough in the sequence of our time so that we can summarize it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in what looks like an orderly form—or at any rate a poetic form. It composes into something we can understand. We come late in a time when the burden of descriptive and historical knowledge is greater than any man or group of men can encompass; when the labor by which our society gets along from day to day is not only divided but disparate and to the individual laborer fragmentary; and when, in an effort to cope with the burden of knowledge and the division of labor, we have resorted to the adulterative process called universal education.

As a natural effect of such a situation we have the disappearance or at least the submergence of tradition in the sense that it is no longer available at either an instinctive or a critical level but must be looked for, dug out, and largely re-created as if it were a new thing and not tradition at all. We have also a decay of the power of conviction or mastery; we permit ourselves everywhere to be overwhelmed by the accidents of our massive ignorance and by the apparent subjectivity of our individual purposes. Thus we have lost the field of common reference, we have dwindled in our ability to think symbolically, and as we look about us we see all our old unconscious skills at life disappearing without any apparent means of developing new unconscious skills.

We have seen rise instead a whole series of highly conscious, but deeply dubious and precarious skills which have been lodged in the sciences of psychology, anthropology, and sociology, together with the whole confusion of practices which go with urbanization. Consider how all these techniques have been developed along lines that discover trouble, undermine purpose, blight consciousness, and prevent decision; how they promote uncertainty, insecurity, anxiety, and incoherence; how above all they provide barriers between us and access to our common enterprise. Perhaps the unwieldy and unmanipulable fact of urbanization does more of the damage than the conscious techniques.

But this is not a diagnosis, it is a statement of sequence, a composition of things in relation. At the point where we arrest this sequence, and think in terms of what we can remember

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of our old culture, does it not seem plain to us what we have? Do we not have a society in which we see the attrition of law and rational wisdom and general craft? Do we not have an age anti-intellectual and violent, in which there is felt a kind of total responsibility to total disorder? Who looks ahead except to a panacea or a millenium which is interchangeable with an invoked anarchy, whether in the world or in the individual personality? Do we not above all each day wonderfully improve our chances of misunderstanding each other? These are the questions we ask of a living, not a dead, society.

They become more emphatic when we ask them about the schools of art and criticism which accompanied this shift in the structure of society. If we begin with Arnold's effort at the secularization of the old culture, it is easy to remind ourselves of the sequence which it began. Here it is, in very rough order. The hedonism in Pater, the naturalism of Zola, the impressionism of Anatole France, Art for Art as of the 90's, the naturalistic relativism of de Gourmont, the aestheticism of the psychologists, the rebirth of symbolism (as in Mallarmé and Yeats), the private mind, Imagism and Free verse, futurism, expressionism and expressive form, Dada and surrealism, dream literature, spontaneous or automatic form, anti-intellectual form, the school of Donne in English and American poetry, the stream of consciousness (that libel on Joyce), the revolution of the word, the new cult of the word. Some of these phrases will carry different meanings to different people; let us say that the general sequence runs towards some kind of autonomous and absolute creation and therefore towards total literalism.

That is on the positive side. On the negative side, every school on the list except Arnold's secularism, which was less a school than a plea for one, is an attack on disinterestedness of mind and imagination, though none of them meant to be so. And Arnold, who meant just the opposite, helped them at their business by seeing too much necessity in the offing. All of them either accepted or revolted violently against a predetermined necessity; none of them was able to choose necessity or to identify it with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his will. None of them was apparently acquainted with the sense of our Latin mottoes. Their only causes were Lost Causes; their only individuals were atoms; they reflected their time, as schools must.

The world has about now caught up with these trains of ideas, these images, trends, habits, patterns, these tendencies towards either mass action or isolated action—equally violent whether in attraction or repulsion. It is a world of engineers and anarchs; rather like the Roman world when the impulse of Virgil and the Emperor Augustus had died out and the impulse of Benedict and Augustine had not yet altered the direction and aspect of the general momentum. It is a world alive and moving but which does not understand itself.

Of this world individual artists have given a much better account than the doctrines of their schools would suggest, and they have done so for two reasons. The arts cannot help reacting directly and conventionally to what is actual in their own time; nor can the arts help, whether consciously or not, working into their masterpieces what has survived of the full tradition—however they may contort or corrupt it. They deal with life or experience itself, both what is new and what is accumulated, inherited, still living. They cannot come *de novo*. They cannot help, therefore, creating at a disinterested level, despite themselves. That is why they constitute a resource of what is not new—the greater part of ourselves—and a means of focussing what is new, all that necessarily aggravates us and tears at our nerve ends in our friction with it. That is why Chartres Cathedral survives better than the schools of the Bishop of Chartres; though both were equally vital in their time.

Consider in this light what seem to be the masterpieces of our time. Consider the poetry of Eliot, Yeats, Valéry, Rilke; the novels of Joyce, Gide, Hemingway, Proust, Mann, Kafka; the plays of Shaw, Pirandello, O'Neill; the music of Stravinsky, Bloch, Bartok, Ravel, Satie, Schoenberg; the painting of Matisse, Picasso, Rouault, Marin, Hartley; the sculpture of Maillol, Brancusi, Faggi, LaChaise, Zorach, Archipenko, Moore. Think also,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but at another level, not easy to keep in strict parallel, of the architecture of Leviathan: the railway station at Philadelphia, the Pentagon, the skyscrapers, the gasoline stations, the highway systems, the east and west side highways, apartment houses each a small city, and the interminable multiple dwellings. Think too of the beautiful bridges which connect or traverse eyesores: the Washington Bridge, the Pulaski Skyway. Lastly, for architecture, think of the National Parks, with their boulevards running at mountain peak.

What an expression of an intolerable, disintegrating, irrational world: a doomed world, nevertheless surviving, throwing up value after value with inexhaustible energy but without a principle in sight. And how difficult to understand the arts which throw up the values. Only Hemingway and Maillol in the roster above perhaps made works which seem readily accessible when seriously approached. Shaw is as difficult as Joyce, Mann as Kafka, if you really look into them. The difficulties arise, it seems to me, partly because of the conditions of society outlined above as they affect the audience and partly because of these same conditions as they affect the artist at his work. The two are not the same, though they are related. The audience is able to bring less to the work of art than under the conditions of the old culture, and the artist is required to bring more. What has changed its aspect is the way the institutions, the conceptions, the experience of culture gets into the arts. What has happened is what was said above: almost the whole job of culture has been dumped on the artist's hands.

It is at this point that we begin to get at the burden of criticism in our time. It is, to put it one way, to make bridges between the society and the arts: to prepare the audience for its art and to prepare the arts for their artists. The two kinds of preparation may sometimes be made in one structure; but there is more often a difference of emphasis required. Performance, the condition we are after, cannot mean the same thing to the audience and the artist. The audience needs instruction in the lost skill of symbolic thinking. The arts need rather to be shown how their old

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

roles can be played in new conditions. To do either, both need to be allied to the intellectual habits of the time. Besides analysis, elucidation, and comparison, which Eliot once listed as the functions of criticism, criticism in our time must also come to judgment.

If we look at the dominant development in criticism in English during the last thirty years—all that Mr. Ransom means by the New Criticism—with its fineness of analysis, its expertness of elucidation, and its ramifying specialization of detail—we must see how natural, and at bottom how facile, a thing it has been. It has been the critics' way of being swept along, buoyed more by the rush than by the body of things. It is a criticism, that is, which has dealt almost exclusively either with the executive technique of poetry (and only with a part of that) or with the general verbal techniques of language. Most of its practitioners have been men gifted in penetrating the private symbolisms and elucidating the language of all that part of modern poetry we have come to call the school of Donne. With a different criticism possibly another part of modern poetry might have become dominant, say the apocalyptic school—though of course I cannot myself think so. In any case, it was a criticism created to cope with and develop the kind of poetry illustrated by Eliot's *Waste-land* and Yeats' *Tower,* two poems which made desperate attempts to reassert the tradition under modern conditions: Eliot by Christianity, Yeats by a private philosophy. Eminently suited for the *initial* stages of the criticism of this poetry, it has never been suited to the later stages of criticism; neither Eliot nor Yeats has been compared or judged because there has been no criticism able to take those burdens. For the rest, the "new criticism" has been suited for *some* older poetry, but less because of the nature of the poetry than because of the limitation of the modern reader. For most older poetry it is not suited for anything but sidelights, and has therefore made misjudgments when applied. It is useless for Dante, Chaucer, Goethe, or Racine. Applied to drama it is disfiguring, as it is to the late seventeenth and all the eighteenth century poetry. Yet it has had to be used and abused because

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there has seemed no other way of recreating—in the absence of a positive culture outside poetry—a verbal sensibility capable of coping with the poetry at all. In a stable society with a shared culture capable of convictions, masteries, and vital dogmas, such a criticism might have needed only its parallel developments for the novel and the play and the older forms of all literature; such a society does not need much criticism. But in an unstable society like ours, precisely because the burden put upon the arts is so unfamiliar and so extensive (it is always the maximum burden in intensity) a multiple burden is put upon criticism to bring the art to full performance. We have to compare and judge as well as analyze and elucidate. We have to make plain not only what people are reading, but also—as Augustine and the other fathers had to do with the scriptures—what they are reading about.

Here I do not wish to be misunderstood. Critics are not fathers of a new church. I speak from a secular point of view confronting what I believe to be a secular world which is not well understood; and I suppose what I want criticism to do can as well as not be described as the development of aesthetic judgment—the judgment of the rational imagination—to conform with the vast increase of material which seems in our time capable only of aesthetic experience. This is not to define a revelation or create a society. It is to define and explore the representations in art of what is actually going on in existing society. I see no reason why all forms of the word *aesthetic* cannot be restored to good society among literary critics by remembering its origin in a Greek word meaning to perceive, and remembering also its gradual historical limitation to what is perceived or felt—that is, what is actually there—in the arts. I have here the company of Bergson who thought that the serious arts gave the aesthetic experience of the true nature of what the institutions of society are meant to control. And in another way, I have more support than I want in the philosophy of Whitehead, who found that the sciences in new growth, far from giving us knowledge with relation among its parts, give us instead abstractions good for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

practical manipulation but comformable only to a mystery. As a consequence, his philosophy of organism, with its attribution of feeling relations everywhere, is an aesthetic philosophy; in which knowledge comes to us as an aesthetic experience.

We do not need to go so far as Whitehead. The sort of thing that is wanted here to go on with seems to show clearly in James Joyce, whose *Ulysses* is the direct aesthetic experience of the breakdown of the whole Graeco-Christian world, not only in emotion but also in concept. Or again, Mann's *Magic Mountain* is the projected aesthetic experience of both that whole world and the sickness which is breaking it down. And again, Gide's *Counterfeiters* is a kind of gratuitous aesthetic experience—a free possibility—of what is happening along with the breakdown. Lastly, Eliot's religious poetry is a partly utopian and partly direct aesthetic experience of the actual Christian life today. That is what these works are about, and they cannot be judged aesthetically until full stock has been taken of what they are about. For us, they create their subjects; and indeed it is the most conspicuous thing about them that they do so. On each of these authors—even Eliot in his kind of reference—the whole substance of his subject is a necessary part of the aesthetic experience of it. It is for that reason that we have to judge the subject as well as what is done with it. To exaggerate only a little, in the world as it is, there is no way to get a mastery of the subject except in the aesthetic experience. How do we go about doing so?

That is, how does criticism enlarge its aesthetics to go with the enlargement of aesthetic experience? Here we must take again the risk of generalization, and we must begin with a generalization to get what the sciences have done with aesthetics out of the way. If we do not get rid of them by generalization we cannot get rid of them at all, for in detail their techniques are very tempting. Let us say then that psychology turns aesthetics into the mechanics of perception, that scientific logic turns it into semasiology, just as technical philosophers had already turned it into a branch of epistemology. All these studies are troublemakers and lead, like our social studies, to the proliferation of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a sequence of insoluble and irrelevant problems so far as the critic of literature is concerned. Let us put it provisionally, that for the literary critic aesthetics comprises the study of superficial and mechanical executive techniques, partly in themselves, but also and mainly in relation to the ulterior techniques of conceptual form and of symbolic form. I do not say that one of these is deeper or more important than another, certainly not in isolation. But let us take them in the order given, and generalize a program of work.

By superficial and mechanical executive techniques I mean the whole rationale of management and manipulation through more or less arbitrary devices which can be learned, which can be made elegant, and which are to some extent the creatures of taste or fashion so far as particular choice is concerned. In some lucky cases they may be the sole preoccupation of the working artist, as in some unlucky cases they may be the one aspect of his work to which he seemingly pays least attention. In our own day they are troublesome to the extent that they are ignored in an abeyance from which they ought to be redeemed. It would seem to me, for example, that a considerable amount of potentially excellent verse fails to make its way because the uses of metre—in the sense that all verse has metre—are not well understood, though they are now beginning again to be played with: Mr. Eliot has just resorted to the metrics of Johnson and Milton. The critic who is capable of doing so ought to examine into the metres of his victims. Similarly, the full narrative mode is in little use by serious novelists, and the full dramatic mode is not in much more use; yet these are the basic modes of a man telling a story. If only because they are difficult, the critic ought to argue for them when he sees a weakness which might have been turned into a strength by their use. Again, and related to the two previous examples, there is a great deal of obscurity in modern writing which could be cleared up if writers could be forced (only by criticism) to develop a skill in making positive statement, whether generalized or particular, whether in verse or in prose. Statement may make art great and ought not to be subject to fashion.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And so on. The critic can have little authority as a pedagogue. The main study of executive techniques will always be, to repeat, in relation to the ulterior techniques of conceptual and symbolic form. By conceptual techniques I mean the rationale of what the artist does with his dominant convictions, or obsessions, or insights, or visions, and how they are translated into major stresses of human relations as they are actually experienced. Here we are concerned with the aesthetics of the idea in relation to the actual, of the rational in relation to what is rationalised. In Dostoevsky, for example, we are interested in his conception of the Double only as we see what happens to it in the character of Versilov, or Raskolnikov, or Dmitri Karamazov. In Joyce's *Ulysses* it is not the Homeric pattern of father and son that counts, but what happens to the conception of intransigence in Stephen in concert and conflict with that transigent man Bloom. So in the later poems of Yeats, the concepts of the Phases of the Moon are interesting as they work or fail to work in the chaos and anarchy and order of actual lyric emotions. On a more generalized level, it is through concern with conceptual techniques that one notes that the European novels of greatest stature seem to follow, not the conceptual pattern of Greek tragedy but the pattern of Christian rebirth, conversion, or change of heart; which is why novels do not have tragic heroes. But examples are endless.

And all of them, as those just cited, would tend if pursued to lead us into the territory of symbolic techniques which underlies and transcends them. I am not satisfied with the term. By symbolic techniques I mean what happens in the arts—*what gets into the arts*—that makes them relatively inexhaustible so long as they are understood. I mean what happens in the arts by means of fresh annunciations of residual or traditional forces, whether in the language, culture, or institutions of the artist's society. I mean those forces that operate in the arts which are greater than ourselves and come from beyond or under ourselves. But I am not satisfied with the definitions any more than I am with the term. It may be I mean invokable forces, or raw forces, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

force of reality, whatever reality may be, pressing into and transforming our actual experience. It is what bears us and what we cannot bear except through the intervention of one of the great modes of the mind, religion, philosophy, or art, which, giving us the illusion of distance and control, makes *them,* too, seem forces greater than ourselves. It is in the figure of Dante himself in the *Divine Comedy,* Faustus in *Faustus,* Hamlet and Lear in *Hamlet* and *Lear,* Emma Bovary in *Madame Bovary,* all the brothers in *The Brothers Karamazov.* It is in the conjunction of the gods of the river and of the sea with the Christian gods in Eliot's *Dry Salvages.* It is the force of reality pressing into the actuality of symbolic form. Its technique is the technique of so concentrating or combining the known techniques as to discover or release that force. It is for this purpose and in this way that the executive, conceptual, and symbolic techniques go rationally together: the logic, the rhetoric, and the poetic; they make together the rationale of that enterprise in the discovery of life which is art. But the arts are not life, though in the sense of this argument they may make a rationale for discovering life. Whether they do or not, and how far, is the act of judgment that is also the last act in bringing particular works of art to full performance. Because the arts are imperfect, they can be judged only imperfectly by aesthetic means. They must be judged, therefore, by the declaration and elucidation of identity in terms of the whole enterprise which they feed, and of which they are the play, the aesthetic experience. There is a confusion here that cannot be clarified for it is a confusion of real things, as words are confused in a line of verse, the better the line the more completely, so that we cannot tell which ones govern the others. The confusion is, that it is through the aesthetic experience of it that we discover, and discover again, what life is, and that at present, if our account of it is correct, we also discover what our culture is. It is therefore worthwhile considering the usefulness of a sequence of rational critical judgments upon the art of our time as an aid in determining the identity, the meaning in itself, of present society. Such a sequence

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of judgments might transform us who judge more than the art judged.

Here perhaps is a good point to sweep some bad rubbish into the bins. Critical judgment need not be arrogant in its ambitions, only in its failures. Nor is it concerned with ranks and hierarchies, except incidentally. What I mean by judgment is what Aristotle would have meant by the fullest possible declaratory proposition of identity. Again, the ideal of judgment—no more to be reached by critics than by other men—is theological: as a soul is judged finally, quite apart from its history, for what it really is at the moment of judgment. Our human approximation of such judgment will be reached if we keep the ideal of it in mind and with that aid make our fullest act of recognition. Judgment is the critic's best recognition.

Thus it is now clear that my purpose in proposing a heavy burden for criticism is, to say the least of it, evangelical. What I want to evangelise in the arts is rational intent, rational statement, and rational technique; and I want to do it through technical judgment, clarifying judgment, and the judgment of discovery, which together I call rational judgment. I do not know if I should have enough eloquence to persuade even myself to consider such a burden for criticism, did I not have, not this time as precautions but as mentors, my three Latin mottoes. *Omnis intellectus omniformis est. Fides quaerens intellectus. Corruptio optima pessima.* They point the risk, and make it worth taking.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Caution

Beware Aristotelian man,
Baal's bloody idols do not fall
By categories to your scan
And often tumble not at all.

Your catalog may not include
Twin rattlesnakes entwined below
A crown of porphyry: the crude
And polished art of Tezcuco.

The grim Dacotah waste of soul
Before a deer trapped in a pit
Writes nothing on your careful scroll,
Though death and madness come of it:

Empirical and evident
Are strength and motion, form and size:
None saw, when Samson's back was bent,
Intention in his mangled eyes.

The Froward Gull

The bird has flared his wingtips on the reef,
His beak extended like a whale boat prow;
And individual evil past belief
With caution teeters on the point of Now.
Gulls beyond sudden counting stiffly set
And tack their wings like cutters. In their glide—
The flash of wings above the flash of wet—
Is movement, universal as the tide.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No carrion taints that motion in the air.
No quick reflection lights these crusted eyes:
Upon black reef I shun the knowing stare,
Seeking the separate principle which flies:
Between this only and these many birds
Lies ancient paradox escaping words.

Time at Timberline

Within this gray substantial rock
In changeless process heat and cold
Shear off the planes which interlock
Into a pyramidal mold:
Describe a mountain on a base
Whirling in speculative space.

Below the rock-slide lies this earth
These particles of granite pan,
Providing victual for the birth
Of vegetable into man:
The fall of fragments like his bone
Is not determined by the stone.

The glint of quartz along the cleft
Of granite, when the pieces fall
Provides a standard for the deft
Repair of cliff-face, that is all
Progression into utter doom
And changeless space within his tomb.

—DONALD F. DRUMMOND

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Action as Rational: Racine's Bérénice

FRANCIS FERGUSSON

Zénon! Cruel Zénon! Zénon d'Elée!
M'as-tu percé de cette flèche ailée
Qui vibre, vole, et qui ne vole pas!
Ah! le Soleil! . . . Quelle ombre de tortue
Pour l'âme, Achille immobile à grands pas!

I

THE DRAMA OF RACINE AND CORNEILLE, which reached perfection in its kind, is usually eyed by English-speaking readers with a mixture of admiration and mockery. It is pure heroic drama, "Une action héroique, accomplie par des personnages ayant pour idéale le triomphe de la volonté sur l'instinct." Or it may be described as the drama of Reason, for it bears a relation to Rationalism, from Descartes to Kant, similar to that of Sophoclean drama to the philosophy of Aristotle. Neither the "natural" shepherd nor the equivocating clown is allowed on its stage; and this makes us uneasy. As Mr. William Empson pointed out in *Some Versions of Pastoral,* the vitality of drama in English has hitherto been based on some combination of the heroic and pastoral, the tragic and comic. Though it is now difficult for us to read Shakespeare with understanding, the habit of mind which led him to mix the styles and the perspectives for his audiences is still with us in a way; and if we cannot have the disbelieving oaf onstage, we are disposed to take his part ourselves, rudely tossing up some stinking skull of Yorick to relieve the moments of solemnity, and make us feel that we are all "human together after all."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If we are to bring Racine into focus, we must relinquish our timid irony. In the first scene of Bérénice, Antiochus, *roi de Comagène,* sets the stage for us and for Arsace, his indispensable confidant:

Arrêtons un moment. La pompe de ces lieux,
Je le vois bien, Arsace, est nouvelle à tes yeux.
Souvent ce cabinet superbe et solitaire
Des secrets de Titus est le dépositaire.
C'est ici quelquefois qu'il se cache à sa cour,
Lorsqu'il vient à la Reine expliquer son amour.
De son appartement cette porte est prochaine,
Et cet autre conduit dans celui de la Reine.

Let us stop a moment. The magnificence of this place,
I see well, Arsace, is new to your eyes.
Often is this stately and solitary chamber
Entrusted with the secrets of Titus.
Here sometimes he withdraws from the court
When he comes to expound his love to the queen.
This door leads to his chambers,
And that other to those of the queen.

The ringing words establish not only the stage itself, with its two significant doors, its lustres and its polished floors, but the spiritual locus also: the *pureté* and *clarté* of the glittering moral consciousness. It is shared by the Emperor Titus, by Queen Bérénice, and by Antiochus—since he now, in his wig, his breastplate and his ruffles, gravely takes it for his own. We in the audience must pull ourselves together, for it is assumed that we too shall live up to such rigors.

We are informed at once that, for all its *pompe,* this region is eternally sad, being shadowed by the mortal peril of love. It is love which Titus comes here to *expliquer,* and, when Arsace has

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gone to summon Bérénice, Antiochus sets forth his own timeless struggle with love, in terms of the facts of his present situation. He is in love with Bérénice, but Bérénice is in love with Titus, and their forthcoming marriage has been announced. At the same time, Titus and Antiochus owe each other the duties of an ancient friendship, and all three are responsible for that "univers" —Rome or France—which they rule, and which adores but cannot help them. No wonder Antiochus is obliged to conceal a trembling of the inner being. It would be indelicate for him to leave his friends without explanation, and equally so to explain, for a declaration of love would embarrass the Queen. This means that he must take his stance on the very point of hopelessness itself, the edge between love and reasonable duty. He will merely explain to the Queen that

Exemple infortuné d'une longue constance,
Après cinq ans d'amour et d'espoir superflus,
Je pars, fidèle encor quand je n'espère plus.

Ill-fated example of long constancy,
After five years of love and vain hope,
I depart, faithful still, though I hope no more.

It is this chord which closes his tirade, epitomizing and confirming its many antitheses. "Le son m'enfante": the music of the verse brings us alive; yet the eye of the mind is upon that thin and cutting edge where rationality meets its opposite. The poignancy is deep, and a good actor could make us feel it, but not at the expense of the thin, clean musical line, or the clarity of the exposition, both of which are impeccable. The tirade should have the excitement of the acrobatic stunt near the top of the tent, while the drum rolls; but such is our confidence in Antiochus's polite dexterity, that we are never uncomfortable. And when we think over his analysis we may see that it applies to a moment or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

aspect of our own experience, and get that full "tristesse majestueuse qui fait tout le plaisir de la tragédie," as Racine describes it.

When Arsace returns to say that Bérénice will soon appear, the situation of the three passionate monarchs is again analyzed, this time in the dialectical form of question and answer. Arsace asks all the right questions, but he exists only as a voice in the dialogue, which is thus essentially a *dialogue intérieur*. If we accept him as that we may enjoy the order and clarity of word and idea. It is only when we look at him directly, as a person in his own right, that his complete non-entity may seem absurd.

With the arrival of Bérénice the temperature rises again; we are closer to the crux of the situation. She explains her share in it much as Antiochus has explained his: the Roman Senate may oppose her marriage to Titus and precipitate the conflict between love and duty. She has the same clean grave inner life as Antiochus, and when he repeats to her the explanation he has given us, he might be speaking for her also. They are two instruments, but the subject of their duet is the same, identically, as that of Antiochus's solo; and he brings their scene to a close as he had his tirade:

Surtout ne craigniez point qu'une aveugle douleur
Remplisse l'univers du bruit de mon malheur.
Madame, le seul bruit d'une mort que j'implore
Vous fera souvenir que je vivais encore.
Adieu.

Above all, fear not that a blind grief
Fill the universe with the sound of my misfortune.
Madame, only the report of the death which I crave
Will make you remember that I still lived.
Farewell.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Bérénice-Antiochus scene really completes the analysis of the first situation between the three, but after Antiochus's departure Bérénice and Phénice, her *confidante,* have a brief exchange in which the possible opposition of the Roman Senate to Titus's marriage is brought up again. This emphasis produces "suspense"—lets us know that the plot is ticking along offstage and will presently produce another situation, which will be analyzed in Act II. The situations change, in this manner, throughout the play, like the shifting disposition of pieces on a chessboard. But the tone, the texture of language, and the rational action which the play imitates and embodies, are identical from beginning to end. The very first line of the play might have put us in possession of all we shall ever know about this motionless action and its elegant demonstration. And the words with which Bérénice closes the play put once more (and perhaps even more beautifully) what Antiochus has said in the two passages I quoted:

Adieu. Servons tous trois d'exemple à l'univers
De l'amour la plus tendre et la plus malheureuse
Dont il puisse garder l'histoire douleureuse.
Tout est prêt. On m'attend. Ne suivez point mes pas.
(à Titus)
Pour la dernière fois, adieu, seigneur.
ANTIOCHUS:
Hélas.

Farewell. Let us all three serve as an example to the universe
Of the tenderest and the unhappiest love
Of which it can keep the painful history.
All is ready. I am awaited. Do not follow me.
(to Titus)
For the last time, farewell, my lord.
ANTIOCHUS:
Alas.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Voltaire remarked upon the unique simplicity of *Bérénice,* marvelling that such touching things could be drawn from so few elements. Racine was very proud of this simplicity, which he achieved by purifying his drama of the complicated intrigue, and of all blood and death, even offstage. Probably he was thinking how much better *Bérénice* was than the plays of Corneille, which are much more violent and *mouvementé*. It seems to me that Racine was right, that the ingenious intrigue and the offstage violence which neoclassic drama often includes, are "lapses from the high plane" it intends to keep, essentially irrelevant to the true matter, the rational action, on which it is based. The plot or intrigue appeals to the *discursive* reason, with its capacity for mechanical and logical ingenuity; but the action of rationality *itself,* the life of the soul as a reasoning creature—the integrity of the ethical will—is the moment in the rhythm of human life which this drama primarily envisages.

It was Descartes who said, "Je pense, donc je suis," but it was Kant, in *Metaphysic of Morals,* who intuited directly that will to reason, or reasonable will, from which human conduct "should" follow deductively, as the corollaries follow the intuited axioms of geometry. The soul considered as purely rational is the law of its own being—free alike of God and of the world. This makes it appallingly responsible to itself, and to any other rational soul, which is identical with it in essence. Kant's notions of the Categorical Imperative and of the Kingdom of Ends provide an indispensable clue to the spiritual matter and the principles of composition of neoclassic tragedy. The timeless moment of the soul as rational is so abstract, so univocally *one,* that the individualities and the "angles of vision" of the *dramatis personae* are extremely unimportant. The *suivantes* and the *confidants* are present for dialectical or expository reasons only—to bring out the protagonists. As for Bérénice, Titus and Antiochus, they exist strictly on the one high plane; live, so to speak, with the same life. The conventional masks of Kings and Queens whereby we distinguish them are very unimportant; and the diverse circumstances in which they act, are, as I have remarked, discursively

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

handled, like the abstract counters of a game, so that all is held in the motionless light of rationality. This is the simplicity which Racine so beautifully preserves, defining a content as abstract as that of the music of the time, and as perfectly actualizable.

When the action of reason is thus intuited directly, in its absoluteness, it is against a background of outer darkness. Kant vindicated the authority of Reason against the lawless intuitions of British empiricism, leaving things in themselves (except for the reasonable will) completely unknowable. Racine's outer darkness is that of Passion in all its modes. Though he is always "explaining" love, the explanation, in effect, disowns it; the audience, like the author and his *dramatis personae,* must be identified with the reason in its sad feat of perpetual self-demonstration. From this paradox comes the vibrant quality of the action of reason, the tragic sense peculiar to neoclassic drama.

The drama of Racine and Corneille as we know it, depends, of course, as much upon the forms and social conventions of the social microcosm in which it had its life, as it does upon the basic spiritual and formal inspiration of rationalism. When the élite of the age of Louis XIV felt rationality histrionically, whether for social or dramatic purposes, they called it "gloire". This word, as used by Racine and Corneille, appears to refer to all the ways in which the individual, in his obedience to the Categorical Imperative, could shine forth to his audience—from vulgar reputation, which worries Phèdre and Oenone when they think Theseus may find out about Phèdre's affair with Hippolyte, to the heavenly glory of sainthood which Corneille's Polyeucte secures for himself. I say "all the ways", because we should probably think of these meanings of "gloire" as essentially different; but in the ideal moral and social scheme of the time they were one. God and the society of the Roi Soleil were alike politely assumed to see thus rationally, and the glare of publicity was supposed to be identical with the inner light. Hence the solemn invariability of mood and tone which embarrasses the Anglo-Saxon. Rationality, when acted out in the drawing room, in politics, or on the stage, looks like mummery, a strict and ceremonious game. The price of admission

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to this game, whether as audience or participant, is the tragic acceptance of the limits of the life of Reason. Perhaps the rhetoric about the "univers", and the rapid and bloody offstage intrigue—characteristic blemishes of this genre—are attempts to elude or compensate for its limitations. The psyche, in its straitjacket, like Justice with her sword and bandaged eyes, is pretending to be more and less than human, yet slyly having its revenge. But the "game" itself is deadly serious. If it is not "life", it is at least one moment or aspect of life, and this moment is consistently and conventionally taken for the whole. Even Phèdre never (while she is onstage) loses the light of reason completely, and when "Vénus, à sa proie tout entière attachée", at last drags her from it, her whole being dissolves in the darkness:

Et la mort, à mes yeux dérobant la clarté,
Rend au jour qu'ils souillaient toute sa pureté.

And death, taking away the light from my eyes,
Restores to the day, which they defiled, all its purity.

II

The "moment" of action which neoclassic drama imitates is essential and inescapable; but it corresponds to a moment only in the larger rhythm of Sophoclean Tragedy, or of the *Purgatorio*. It is in Canto xviii that Dante the pilgrim, growing up, growing sadder, wiser and more responsible, is told by Virgil of the rational will, which he has experienced and may now hear majestically named:

Coloro che ragionando andaro al fondo
s'accorser d'esta innata libertate,
però moralità lasciaron al mondo.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Those who in their reasoning went to the foundation,
perceived this innate freedom, wherefore they
left ethics to the world.

The rational-moral action of the soul, in its opposition to the world of sense and emotion, is the material of the central Cantos of the *Purgatorio*. The pilgrim, in his climb, is now under the sign of Reason, and must endeavor to reduce experience to its "facts" and its univocal concepts. If he tries to understand the world, he angrily takes it as all black: "Lo mondo è cieco, e tu ven ben da lui." If he attempts to conceive God, it is in the pallid abstractions of Eighteenth Century Deism. But the concepts never quite fit. He is continually troubled by sensuous images of undeclared significance, by direct experience of other persons, by a vague sense of the possibility of light and freedom of another order, and by memories of his unregenerate state, when his soul, in the innocence of childhood and with an animal-like unity of thought and feeling, moved simply, "toward what delights it." Thus Rationality is treated as part of a long progression, and even in these Cantos the progression is sustained and enlivened by a growing awareness of "the whole psyche in its total situation" which makes it impossible to make a static fetish of the rational modes of knowledge and action.

In *Oedipus the King,* in the scene between Tiresias and Oedipus, Oedipus experiences something very like the neoclassic split between reason and emotion when Tiresias fails to fit his concepts, and, appealing to reason and his rational integrity, he resists the surge of fear and anger. But the presence of Tiresias and the chorus, with their different visions, shows us the total situation of the tragedy as wider than, and prior to, any rationalization of it. And Oedipus himself "moves on" to a wider awareness. His successive *pathoses* bring to him, not so much new facts, as a new perception and a change of heart. Phèdre, on the other hand, must hold at the brink of passion or she is lost, the action ended, and the play over. Neoclassic tragedy does not include either the Pathos, with the wide, vague awareness of the chorus,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or the Epiphany, with its new insight and its substantial change.

For this reason the "moment" of neoclassic tragedy is not identical with, merely analogous to, corresponding moments of the Tragic Rhythm. The intuition which Phèdre possesses of the psyche and its destiny is taken as final; and though she admits new facts which alter her policies, she can experience nothing which could change or develop her being. The issue she faces can neither be transcended nor escaped; Passion (or Pathos) brings darkness and death only. The action of *Oedipus* is a quest; and since it assumes the possibility of perceptions really new, it may be actualized on ever deeper levels. But the action of *Phèdre* is the demonstration of an essence already grasped, and the new facts of the plot simply permit further deductions from the eternal nature of the rational soul in its eternal peril.

The differences between Sophoclean tragedy and neoclassic tragedy seem striking, if one tries, even a little, to compare the two. But Racine and Corneille didn't understand them, as a reading of Racine's prefaces and Corneille's *Trois Discours* will show. Nor did they understand the *Poetics,* which is based on Sophocles. Aristotle and Sophocles have been looked at since from many angles which the neoclassicists didn't imagine; yet the neoclassic conception of the mechanics and esthetics of drama is still subtly influencing us in many ways, getting in the way of a true appreciation of Greek tragedy, and limiting our notion of drama in general.

The plot of a tragedy, "the arrangement of incidents," is its over-all shape or form. One of the most convenient ways to distinguish the neoclassic from the Aristotelian-Sophoclean conception of drama, is to contrast their doctrines of the plot. Aristotle had a distinction between plot and action corresponding to the distinction between matter and form. The "action" or "matter" of *Oedipus,* for instance, is the quest for the source of infection in the Theban body politic; the "form" which actualizes it is the series of incidents directly represented onstage. But in Racine's time the metaphysics of form and matter was being lost, and with it the related Realist concept of *action.* In Aris-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

totle "action" is an analogical concept, referring to the life of the psyche in its various modes, and even to the "actualizations" of other natural beings. But for Racine and Corneille the life of the psyche was ideally one—unchanging and self-existent. When they used the word *action* they were not thinking of the life of the psyche concretely or histrionically apprehended, but of the overt deeds or events which follow from it, and which may be reported as "facts." Thus failing to see what Aristotle meant by action, they made no distinction between action and plot.

The neoclassic doctrine of the plot envisages it in abstraction from action: as the logical or "syllogistic" (as Mr. Kenneth Burke would call it) concatenation of events. It is constructed in order to satisfy, not our direct sense of human life, but the discursive reason, with its need for *logical* coherence and univocal meanings. It must convey a "clear and distinct" moral, providing for the punishment of every fault. At the same time it must divert the audience and lead it on by continually piquing its curiosity: i.e., by "suspense." It was in the management of suspense that the neoclassic dramatists thought they had most obviously surpassed the ancients, who unaccountably told all the "facts" in advance. They did not understand the excitement of the direct perception of the changing being: they sought the rational satisfaction of the geometric demonstration. The description of the parts of the plot which we have inherited from them (exposition, complication, crisis, dénouement) is like the description of a demonstration in Euclid, from the statement of the problem to the triumphant Q.E.D.

In Sophocles the basic unit of composition is the Tragic Rhythm, which progresses, as Mr. Burke has pointed out, from "Purpose to Passion to Perception." The organic parts of the plot, which Aristotle mentions and Professor Gilbert Murray expounds in more detail in relation to ritual, correspond to the moments of the Tragic Rhythm: Purpose represented by the Agon, or conflict of purposes; Passion by the choruses, when the individual consciousness as such is in abeyance, and sensuous

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

images are "suffered," whether in a Bacchic frenzy or with the patience of prayer; Perception by the Recognition Scene, sometimes by the messenger's tale, and sometimes by the epiphany. In Racine and Corneille, on the other hand, the basic unit of composition is the Situation; and this is developed by a rational analysis progressing from the exposition to the dénouement, when a new fact which is reported from offstage changes the donnés.

The neoclassicists accordingly make little use of the organic parts of the plot. The Agon is represented chiefly by the polite discussion: a device of exposition rather than the representation of a real conflict. In Corneille these discussions are sometimes quite spirited; yet consider the dispute between Polyeucte and Sévère, to determine which of Pauline's admirers shall renounce her the more gloriously. Polyeucte, the saint, wants the glory of martyrdom; Sévère, the pagan, wants a glorious death in battle. The ridiculous aspects of this struggle, with its unflattering implications for poor Pauline, and its "after-you-Alphonse" manner, may be forgotten in the beauty of the music and the clarity of the thought; but one can never feel that there is really much of an issue between the two gentlemen. Neither wants Pauline so much as "gloire"; and their respectively pagan and Christian conceptions of "gloire" appear to be identical. This is confirmed if one follows Polyeucte in his progress to sainthood. No purgatorial change is represented. The impact of grace, which occurs offstage, simply moves Polyeucte mechanically from one "situation" to the next, in which there is more of the same Polyeucte and more of the same *gloire*. His "faith" is simply a postulate about means which logically contradicts the pagan postulate of Sévère. The divine irruption of grace leaves the glittering social surfaces unbroken. It is a far cry from this polite exchange to the terrible encounter between Oedipus and Tiresias, which is below the level of rule and concepts, and ushers in substantial changes in Oedipus's individuality.

The same considerations apply to the *pathoses* and the epiphanies. The action as I have said is always on the edge of a pathos which is refused. Much of the literary texture of these dramas of course

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

approaches the lyric, and there are a few formal songs which interrupt the usual Alexandrines. There are the lovely "choruses" in *Esther* and *Athalie*. But they are like the operatic arias which were to develop from them: everything stops, and the virtuoso with the voice develops a moment of feeling which is "timeless" and generalized, and hence not an organic part of the dramatic development. In general, neither Racine nor Corneille understood the chorus as part of the drama. Corneille thought its sole purpose was to rest the audience between the acts, and that his own custom of entertaining the audience with music while the curtain was down was an improvement on the practice of Sophocles. One of the best ways to reveal the limitations of neoclassic drama is to show its incapacity to represent the accepted suffering of the non-rational, with its perils and its creative possibilities: the moments of human experience represented by the Sophoclean chorus and by the nights in the *Purgatorio*. Nietzsche built a whole theory of tragedy, based on the Pathos, to explain *Tristan und Isolde*, and I propose to return to the Pathos as the clue to composition in another essay on romantic notions of drama.

I have pointed out that neoclassic tragedy, which is, so to speak, at the summit or the source of rationalism, does directly envisage the one moment of psychic life in its concreteness. If you remove the direct sense of the soul as reasoning, what is left is the abstract, discursive plot. It is the "plot" in this sense which is still with us: a conception of the mechanics of drama as useful as elementary engineering, and as free of spiritual content. After the Categorical Imperative, the Felicific Calculus; and after the tragedies of Racine and Corneille, the well-made plays of the modern stage: mystery plays, thesis and propaganda plays, plays of the endless intrigue for love and money, all constructed on the principles of the discursive plot with its syllogistic progression—all free of any direct sense of human life in its concreteness. And no wonder: this plot or "intrigue" has come to seem the very shape of the busy-ness of the big city: an endlessly recurring game for the abstract tokens of pleasure and power.

The rationalistic plot has proved endlessly useful in Hollywood,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Broadway, and the standard courses in playwriting. But this is not all that neoclassic tragedy offers; and its esthetics, or basic conception of form, has influenced many modern writers in search of high and strict conceptions of drama and literature. Its extremely refined moral sensibility may seem to be the cure for our morose self-indulgence; the clarity and purity of its esthetic images for our slovenly imaginations. If the Greek and the Medieval sense of the world as real and ordered has really gone for good, where shall we look if not to the French Seventeenth Century for some notion of moral and esthetic rectitude?

The esthetic perfection which Racine and Corneille sought may be felt at once in the elegant convention of their *Alexandrines*. Histrionically considered, the couplet "feels" always at the end, at the perfect, aphoristic summary. English blank verse, less perfect and more flexible, can reflect far more of the psyche's subtle posturings; and *terza rima,* with its endlessly interlocking rhymes, reflects at any moment only a provisional unity; and, as the angle of vision shifts, it follows the process of change. The neat balance, the intricate symmetry, and the clarity of the elements in the Alexandrine couplet make us feel secure: within it all is in final order, though it often has "interest"—the illusion of variety and change. The "order" would appear to be that of the logical contradiction: stress equal and opposite to counter-stress, thesis to antithesis. The contradiction is never substantially transcended—the third term, the synthesis on another level, is never provided—there is only another couplet and another way of saying the same thing. But the oppositions *seem* to be transcended by the very clarity with which they are put, much as the manner of salon or stage offers a surface so perfect as to "transcend" the tragic split which makes it possible. The surface *is* the unity: the univocal, immediately clear *identity* of idea or of esthetic image.

I should put it that the neoclassic sense of form demanded literal unity, whereas that of Sophocles, for instance, demands oneness "by analogy" only. This no doubt has everything to do with what I have called the "locus" of the drama. The ideal

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

court or salon of Racine is defined by exclusion, in order to reach "absolute" and timeless perfection; the locus of Sophoclean tragedy is sacred yet accessible to all: open to daylight and common sense, to the traditions of the tribe, and to the influence of the gods in the surrounding hills and under the earth. It is mysterious, and the elements that compose it are mysterious, and real in their own right. The clownish guard in *Antigone*, the old shepherd in *Oedipus*, with his wilderness taciturnity, are as real as the King and Queen, have as essential an angle of vision upon the life of the community, which is the "supreme analogue," whereby all the separate lives are seen as "one." This unity is never literally realized at any moment, but rather divined as the result of our experience of the play as a whole.

If the esthetic image is thought of as thus clear and distinct, literally one, final and timeless, the temptation is to deny its relation to social, moral or religious values, as in Stephen Daedalus's esthetics as he expounds them in the *Portrait*. Most of the best contemporary doctrines of art appear to be reaching for a neoclassic ideal. Mr. John Crowe Ransom, for instance, has written that Aristotle's theory of tragic purgation implies that he did not really get the true esthetic pleasure, because of the analogy he implies between purgation secured by tragedy and that secured by laxatives or moral growth. Because of his Realist theory of tragedy, which takes the elements of the composition as substances rather than ideas, Aristotle could consider them from various angles without feeling any contradiction. The *thing* was prior to any meanings we might see in it, and might therefore have moral and esthetic values at once.

If the moral life is thought of as absolute in a Kantian and neoclassic sense, it too can be cultivated apart from the world or God; and in our faithless time a Henry James, or a Joyce, or (in spite of his religion) an Eliot, will tend to conceive the substance and the form of serious drama in neoclassic terms. But there is one important difference: Maggie Verver and Richard Rowan and Thomas of Canterbury, for all their clarity and rectitude, live in private worlds, whereas Titus and Phèdre and Poly-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eucte move in a realm which, if "ideal," is at least publicly accepted.

In the neoclassic scheme, esthetic perfection replaces the beatitude of the *Paradiso* and the natural sanctity of *Oedipus at Colonus*. The neoclassic protagonist, rigidly heroic, never the scapegoat, may not reach a heaven substantially different from the salon; but there, in the eye of reason and the glare or "gloire" of the lustres, he enjoys the eternity of the perfect artifact. M. Jean Cocteau, in his very modern and theatrical transposition of the Oedipus story, *La Machine Infernale*, has arranged an esthetic Assumption for the end, when Oedipus and his children change from the human to the legendary:

> CRÉON: *Et en admettant qu'ils sortent, qui les accompagnera? Qui les recueillera?*
> TIRÉSIAS: *La Gloire.*
>
> CRÉON: *And granting that they go, who will accompany them? Who will receive them?*
> TIRÉSIAS: *La Gloire.*

The discoveries of neoclassic drama, in short, are still nourishing us in many ways. Perhaps they are the best notions of drama now available for use. Yet it is important to distinguish neoclassic drama both from its degenerate descendants, the well-made plays, and from the much wider and deeper form of Sophoclean Tragedy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Carol

Now is the world withdrawn all
In silence and night
To beweeping Adam's fall
That this biography began
Of vile man.

Now the serpent smiles on sin
In silence and night
And sees the tumor swell within;
The heavy fruit that was the heart
Beat apart.

The spider's spittle weaves the shroud
In silence and night
Wide enough for all the proud;
And gapes the grave in pompous black
At our back.

Christ the King is born again
In silence and night
Bringing mercy to all men
Whose separate pride full is beguiled
By this child.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

From Eden's Tree the Cross is made
In silence and night
Where Adam's bondman now is nailed
While the wild multitude
Cries for blood.

The great grave-stone is rolled away
In silence and night
And He arose on the third day
That Adam might, free of the chains,
Choose his pains

And follow Him upon the Cross
In silence and night
And disdain all worldly loss
And to the compassionate King
Pray and sing.

Therefore do we cross this hour
In silence and night
Our grief and joy, weakness and power,
Whereto Christ's glory and His pain
Both constrain.

For there was born at Bethlehem
In silence and night
The world's and heaven's single stem
That to both kingdoms we might then
Say Amen.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Bacterial War

Above all, not by violence—
We fought without brutality
And only test-tubes could incense
Heroes to their mortality.
The public and obedient saints
Whose right to serve was their one pride
Lined up with all their documents,
Enlisted and inhaled and died.

Encounters with the enemy
Were frowned upon by adjutants:
Soldiers instead would fight to be
Strangled by simple ambience,
And breathing was the bravery
Of those without the uniform
Who did not hold Thermopylae
Against the microscopic worm.

Not guilt but total innocence
The outcome of this holy war—
Not so much man's was the offense
But it was nature's so much more.
The sons of man with perfect sense
Thereon attacked both time and space,
And sought to kill the present tense
And square the round world's grievous face.

—HOWARD NEMEROV

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*Reflections on Style**

JOHN PEALE BISHOP

DICTION

ANY WORD MAY BE USED in a poem, provided it is resolved in the poem.

The abstract word:

> *Come, thou mortal wretch*
> *With thy sharp teeth this knot intrinsicate*
> *Of life at once untie.*
>
> *Do hold discourse with the incorporal air.*

The vulgar word:

> *And. that worse itch between the thighs.*

Scientific words: More difficult, but always possible. Cf. Donne, Marvell, Laforgue, Eliot.

> *In ephemerides*

The only requisite is that the music should be insisted on in phrases where the abstract word intrudes.

> *Circumscribed a golden grin.*

---

*Reprinted from the forthcoming *Collected Essays of John Peale Bishop;* copyrighted 1948 by Charles Scribner's Sons; used by permission of the publishers.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In general, however, one must avoid any word too far removed from the vocabulary of the ordinary well-spoken man. Excessively technical words tend to take on a comic overtone. Cf. Eliot, where this is deliberate. To be strictly avoided: all words of the political speaker and the editorial writer, not because they are vulgar, but because they are inexact and usually cover up indolence, ignorance and presumption. The use of such a word as dialectic (in the jargon of the radicals) is an excuse for not thinking honestly. This incidentally is the real objection to Marxism. Marx himself was a great and often profound thinker: his disciples (1) introduce a further and usually false simplification, (2) obtrude variations, often false, on the text. However, MacLeish's use of 'dialectic materialism' is correct, since it is dramatically employed. It is no longer his own term, but the terminology of his character.

Country words, dialect. No difficulty, provided they do not interrupt the prevailing mood of the poem.

Urban dialect. Perfectly good if it is really used by the people and are not the quickly passing inventions of newspaper writers, vaudeville and stage personages. In that case they will soon stale.

Eliot has used cockney to write a fragment of sordid tragedy. Cummings has used the street speech of New York for whimsical and satiric purposes.

Practically speaking, I believe we have all the words we need. There is no necessity (as there was twenty-five years ago) to increase the poetic vocabulary. The problem still remains of how not to use words already too loaded with personal meaning by other poets. For example: Yeats's image, norm, pern, gyre.

The English language, like some women, desires and requires that a certain violence be used on it before it will fully yield its beauty. But, forced, it will respond with advances of its own.

English is a mulattress; hence sensuous beyond either of its parents.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Color is the vision of the north; brilliance the color of the south.

The power of English speech can be brought out by restricting one's self to the use of Anglo-Saxon words; but not its splendor.

Very few poets have ever used English as English. Shakespeare, Coleridge, Blake. Perhaps Keats.

English has a northern and a southern province. The poet should live on the border and in his progress should continually step back and forth between the two. On that border is, as a matter of fact, the only place where he can live. The poet is the crooked man who walked a crooked mile.

American English largely a deterioration of English English. But the English of England has also deteriorated; in many places and among certain classes, its state is far worse in England than in America. Galsworthy is a live man speaking the language of ghosts. Spender and Auden are sick men speaking the language of the sanitarium. Their speech has the febrile, rapid, allusive quality of rocking chairs on the front porch of an institution for the cure of what? Civilization, perhaps.

American English has more vigor than English English. But much less accuracy.

Office of the poet—*Donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu.*

The accuracy of the poet is not that of a man sticking a pin in a pinhole already there. It is the accuracy of an archer who hits a butt so far that it cannot be clearly seen, in a high wind.

There is always an element of chance in the poet's hitting his word. The true poet has luck. However, all poets are allowed a second try if they want it.

The Subject.

The poet does not explain. He illuminates.

All poetry has political consequences. But who changed Victorian England—Mrs. Browning with her outcries against industrialism, Hood with his *Song of the Shirt*, Tennyson with his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

exposure of the meanness of the middle classes? No, the Pre-Raphaelites, who in writing of a state of being as far as possible removed from Victorian England made that realm unendurable, ultimately uninhabitable.

Poetry works its cures almost as slowly as nature.

All poetry is philosophical. None deliberately so.

Poetry complete. It is at once the lover, the beloved, and the act of love continually being consummated, forever consummated.

Whenever in doubt about any quality of poetry, remember this image.

Subjects to be avoided by the poet: Anything that can be understood by a newspaperman.

Secret of success (writing as a career): treat of nothing not already known to newspapermen.

TIME AND ART

What is the relation of an artist to the time in which he lives?

I. *The Recorder*

It is possible to go to the artist to increase our knowledge and amplify our experience. He is in any time present as the sensitive and intuitive observer. The *Satyricon. In Our Time. Education Sentimentale.* Tanagra figurines. Abraham (Hieronymus) Bosch.

We immediately recognize that the minor artist is the more complete observer, that if we wish to know the manners and customs of any time, it is not to the creator that we will attend.

Music: Strauss waltzes, Gershwin.

Somehow in these men we are aware that while the age is mirrored, its significance is not to be found.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

II. *The Creator*

What the creator is not:

Aware of the triviality of most observers, those critics and intellectuals who are, or suppose themselves to be, conscious of what is serious and significant in the age, desire that the artist should concern himself with whatever seems to them important. From a historian of manners, he is urged to become a social historian.

It is a matter of amazement to many that Jane Austen does not once mention the Napoleonic wars.

In our own time, the artist has constantly been urged to concern himself with those forces which are at strife, to show a world dying and a world being born. Or, say, the struggle between Individualism and Collectivism, Marx vs. Jefferson. Nothing is of so great moment, and for an artist to concern himself with anything less is to convict himself of triviality, or fiddling in the flames of a world conflagration.

Not only must the artist treat of this struggle, but he must, perforce, ally himself with one or another side. Willingly, or unwittingly, he is either for life or for property, either deliberately communist, or unintentionally fascist. He should openly commit himself, and, having done so, his art must become an aid to action, an instrument of battle.

Those in the past who have not kept aloof. The example of Dante, Milton, Beethoven, David, André Chénier.

Those in the present who have participated: Dos Passos, Diego Rivera, the Russian poets and musicians, Salvator Dali, Gide, Malraux.

Objections to this point of view:

Big subjects make little works. The Jewish grandiosity. *Paradise Lost*. With good intentions one makes bad art.

Art as communication: To the individual, not to the crowd. Each hears alone, whereas in oratory, propaganda, etc., the communication is to what is shared.

How art affects action: Its static quality. To be and not be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

overcome. To feel, to comprehend, to be. If this leads to action, the artist is irresponsible. Rousseau and Robespierre. *The Possessed.* The idea in its pure state and the idea in action.

Art affects the sensibility. Sensibility as the one living change between generations. Why a century is a comprehensible division of time: extent of *living* memory.

Form vs. matter. Form becomes important when a real change of sensibility takes place.

Art is concrete. Hence it is difficult for it to express those relationships which are of use to the general, the statesman, the revolutionist, the sociologist. These relations belong variously to the historian, the economist, the technologian.

We are aware in dealing with great art that it deals with other relationships. Its connection with time is not that of the journalist nor of the historian. Its values are very distinctly not the same.

III. *Art and Time*

What then is the relation of the artist to his time. The question as yet unanswered.

Let us consider what time is, or rather what the consciousness of time is.

The purpose of life is to continue. Biological time as seen by the primitive. Cf. the Southern negro.

The purpose of human life is consciousness. This consciousness takes the form of an apprehension of time and space which in turn brings a desire to escape from time and space.

Consciousness of time. Science. Ancient astronomy, modern physics. Abstruseness of the modern definition, mathematical formula. Poetic equivalent of this; human time and universal time not the same. Shakespeare.

Escape from time. Ecstasy. The saint, desire to be deified. Lovers and drunkards. The general. Battle ecstasy, but the general sees all phases in a single moment. The intellectual escape.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The artistic escape: Fixing the moment. Permanence of the artistic monument. Gibbon and the statue of Eugenius. Gregoriant chant.

We are led now to a third way in which time must be perceived: Institutional time.

1. Earth time. Seasons, changes; but decay so slow as to be scarcely perceptible, at all events much slower than

2. Human time. The growth and decay of the body, the impermanence of thought and emotion.

3. State time. All human institutions subject to growth and decay. The State.

Consideration of State time.

The condition of the State determines how men think and feel. Ultimately this depends upon economic conditions. Marx. Spengler. Discussion and criticism of. Examples. Platonism. Neo-Platonism. But the state is a complex; its economy only one element determining its growth and decay. The economic man an abstraction with which the artist cannot deal. He must take the whole man. Gregorian chant. Bach and Mozart.

The artist has also his own institution, or rather his technique. How he must face the condition of his art when he finds it. Example: Condition depends [on] the whole mind of man. Bach again. Rise of polyphonic music. Baroque conception of State. Social position of artist. Prince and composer. His predecessors. Content of Bach. Baroque conception of time, Suite Anglaise. Same as Andrew Marvell's. Cf. Newton. But Bach goes beyond time: The spiritual problem of the age as discovered by Bach. Contrast Beethoven. Bach the purer. Why? Because he restricts himself to his specific problem with which the artist is qualified to deal. Beethoven looks like Saint Just. Went out of his field. But also because Bach inherited his technique. That technique he developed. Mozart and the rococo. Competence still there. But Beethoven had to create his own competence.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

POETRY AS AN ART

A poem is such an arrangement of words that their real qualities are not obscured by those which have been arbitrarily assigned to them.

A poem is such an arrangement of statements that the arbitrary pauses take precedence over the real pauses.*

By the real qualities of a word I mean those which belong to it by the mere fact of its being a word, its sound, length, weight and accent, and also those which, by virtue of its history, have become attached to it. By the arbitrary qualities of a word I mean those which etymology and current usage assign to it.

A poem necessarily consists of a sequence of statements. Into these the poet introduces certain pauses, which occur at regular or at irregular intervals. These may or may not coincide with those pauses which the sense of his statements would dictate; but at all events they take precedence over them.

That verse is most interesting in which the beat of the sentence runs counter to the beat of the verse; but in order to make sure of this, the beat of the verse must be constantly felt.

The late Amy Lowell, in her free verse, based on what she called cadence, allowed her logical pauses to coincide with and to supersede her poetic pauses. As soon as the novelty wore off, it was seen that her verse had absolutely no interest whatsoever.

CLASSICISM WITHOUT A TOGA

O lead, no longer to follow. To lead where? Where but to joy and glory? Not my glory. To the joy that is rightfully man's and the glory of what is not man.

To invent a new music, for new instruments will be required to witness this joy.

---

* The first two aphorisms here appear in a slightly different form in *The Infanta's Ribbon*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The classic poet does not suffer. Man suffers: only as a man can the poet suffer.

The classic poet is not himself. He assumes a mask in order to speak. Behind the mask is a naked man.

The mask may have contorted features, comic, tragic, or merely grotesque. Behind the mask the poet's mouth moves to inform the mask with speech. For the mask has no voice.

The purpose of the mask is to dehumanize the voice that proceeds out of its mouth.

I am not the poet. I is the mask.

ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STYLE

What is the difference? Huge subject.

1. No such thing as English style as there is a classic French style. There is a period style in English.

Nevertheless certain persistent characteristics. Lack of grammar. Latin foundation. Anglo-saxon and Latin elements. Must always be. Alternation.

American English has shown this. Take care of sound and sense will take care of itself.

The quincunx of heaven. In the fall the war was always there. We cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow. A rat crept softly through the vegetation.

2. This traditional character always modified by sensibilities of each generation—spoken language.

What spoken American language is. Against Mencken. A modification and to some extent a disintegration, a debasement of the language. Not like Synge. Same thing happening in France. Romains. Céline.

3. Postwar style: Speed. Non-logical associations. Freud and the automobile. *Les Lauriers sont Coupés.* Joyce.

Attempt to make a style out of the spoken speech. Joyce, parody of spoken style.

Stein, a rhythmic beat. Repetitions. *Three Lives.* Influence of Flaubert. The word table. Sherwood Anderson.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Faults of these two writers.

From Joyce: Cummings; Dos Passos; Faulkner; the proletarian writers; Edward Dahlberg; the aim to produce a style that will not falsify the material.

From Stein: Hemingway: the hardboiled school.

Outside influences; mostly French: Rimbaud and the ellipsis: Laforgue: ironic contrast between the sentimental and the sordid; past and present, etc.: Eliot.

Books of the postwar period: *The Enormous Room; The Great Gatsby* (Eliot) Hemingway; Anderson; Decadent writing.

SOME INFLUENCES IN MODERN LITERATURE

Joel's suggestion; talk of celebrities I have met. Anecdote of Lytton Strachey. Portrait of: inordinate length of neck; appeared tall and was not; squeaky voice; brown beard. Bennett: lions in front of New York Library; soft tucked shirt, bulging like a man; hair en brosse; rather surly expression as though he had just eaten a zebra and it was too much for him. Siegfried Sassoon, the war poet: morose at the top of the stairs, looking as if he were determined to nurse his own solitude; when seen [at close range] a glittering cast in his eye, like a person insane on one subject and only one, but that filled his mind most of the time. American English ladies. Oxford students. Strachey in cab?

Subject of talk. Why the modern novel has the shape it has. In particular the influence of three people on that form: Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, André Gide. So in a way I shall be talking about celebrities.

Why the novel is what it is.

A middle class art form. Appears first with rising middle class. In England first. Aristocratic forms of writing romance and poetry.

Being middle-class it is concerned with things.

Attitude toward action moral. These characteristics at once

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

appear in Defoe. Moll Flanders, a moral reprobate, who is a pickpocket. Robinson Crusoe, accent on comfort from things. *Sinclair Lewis.*

But the middle class also the *revolutionary class.* Invented a dynamic economic system, necessitating change in every generation. Insensibly the novel becomes social history. Two types: Tea table, which studies a small group; historical panorama: Scott. The two combined more or less in Dickens and Thackeray. The nineteenth century completes the triumph of the middle class and with it of the novel. We even have novels in verse: *Aurora Leigh, Lucille, The Ring and the Book, Enoch Arden.* Material with which the novel deals is changing material. Poetry permanent.

The weakness of the novel. Due to middle class origin has no form. Morality the middle class substitute. Artistically the dynamic quality secured by a moving plot. Dickens. Unimportance of the plot: Cannot remember in what novels his characters are.

Novel not only temporary, nor contemporary. Flaubert, and Hemingway. *In our time.* Poetry which is permanent. MacLeish.

France. The one country which in the nineteenth century retained an interest in form. The social forms of the aristocracy taken over by rising middle class.

Stendhal purifies plot, makes the psychology the dominant interest. Flaubert insists on form.

What the problem of form is: First, to make the reader believe in what is happening, second, to preserve his interest, third, to make him feel that the action is significant.

II

State of novel at beginning of century: Serious novelists had agreed that credibility depended on the author's keeping in background. Characters must appear to move of themselves. Not to be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

explained as Thackeray explained *Vanity Fair*. Ibsen had shown that the most subtle motives could be presented in action by the use of symbols.

Now while the novelist reported what the characters said and did, he still obtruded, discreetly, and as quietly as a good butler, in order to investigate what was behind their actions. He moved around a little like a butler among the guests at a party, from this and that said and done, piecing together and explaining his story. Or at worst he was like the ghostly butler Peter Quint in *The Turn of the Screw*. He went into people's bedrooms and into their minds and reported what was going on.

Joyce: Portrait of: Declined gentility. Pictures not true. Ruddy complexion in the bloom of health. But looks tired always. A man exhausted by his work. Difficulty of communicating. Has increased this by his blindness, eyes always weak, but probably neurotic. Hitler. Drinks only white wine; must have family about him when he writes. Sings, Irish tenor. Mrs. J. never forgiven him. Afraid of height and thunder.

What Joyce did to novel. Form: Investigation of one mind in *Portrait*, sordidness and ecstasy. Told more than any writer up to that time about the development of a certain type, Hamlet, in modern dress. Stephen Dedalus. Proud as Lucifer. Style changes to record different periods of his life.

Ulysses carries this much further: Three minds presented in their entirety. Different style, vocabulary; rhythm, images, etc., for each. Stephen in a poet's phrases, jumbled with theology from St. Thomas Aquinas.

Bloom the scientific but uneducated mind. Molly the inert, fecund matter out of which all life comes, but which is as yet intellectually unconscious, though with a desire for conscious purpose.

Technically: The minds no longer described, but presented. Interior monologue. Objection to: The will cannot function: Elegiac effect.

How we are introduced to *characters* in *Ulysses*. Tell no more about them than a person first meeting them would know. Joyce's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

belief that ordinary life is exciting enough. Birth, death, eating, digesting, thinking.

Movement in Joyce. Cf. Proust. The novel almost static. Twenty-four hours. Nothing much happens. An expanded anecdote. Bloom meets Dedalus. Cf. Dubliners. A small event which will profoundly alter people's lives thereafter. In a sense, the story is after the story. Yet the book is full of verbal movement. Collision of atoms. Like a table seen by a modern physicist. A table moved from one side of a room to another. The room will never be quite the same. In the meanwhile the most intense activity goes on.

Influence on style. Sound. *Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead.* No movement on Mulligan's part. But the words move, to an attentive ear something exciting has happened. Hemingway's *In the fall the war was always there, but we did not go to it any more.* Conscientiousness. Obscenity.

Gertrude Stein: An American Jewess. Long abroad. Royalty in exile. No major domo to tell you how often to kneel. Not enough genuflections. Hemingway, influence on. Gertrude always right. Her jealousy of. Astute woman of McKinley period.

Her weakness. No material. Person to whom her personal experiences do not serve. An emotional invalid. Sees things as we all see walkers when rising for the first time from bed.

What she thinks she is doing: Making writing have implicit sense instead of explicit. Take care of the sound and the sense will take care of itself. Gertrude takes care of not only sound, but the weight, smell, color and potential energy of the word. Not nonsense, strictly speaking, but in much of it useless to look for sense.

Pigeons on the grass, alas.

Her influence. *Three lives.* Style adapted to minds of her characters. Three servant girls. Cf. *Un Coeur Simple.* Servant confuses Holy Ghost and parrot. A symbol. But style is Flaubert's best. Miss Stein makes a story of *Melanchtha* use only words Melanchtha would use. Enormous influence of this. Formal prose

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

made from ordinary speech. First thing you notice is repetition of words. Contrary to accepted English style.

Gertrude's later development of this. Repeats words to make patterns. Cf. Cubist painting. I believe she misunderstood just what they had done. A dislocation of the grammar of speech. Hemingway. Used repetition to link one sentence to another, for musical effect. His fine ear. Characters in *Autobiography* speak like Hemingway's. I believe this a complete invention of Hemingway's. It is not the way either of them talks. Or anybody else for that matter.

American style as opposed to English. Hergesheimer. Obvious that such a style by its false elegance betrays the subject. Rise of the hardboiled style. Comes primarily from Gertrude Stein. Miss Stein is rather hardboiled, like a politician of the Mark Hanna school. Hemingway not a bit hardboiled. A sensitive, and apprehensive man, who cultivates the stoical virtues of the American Indian but has never adopted them. Except for hunting.

In art the human mind moves, but does not advance; there is in any form a development, necessary, inevitable; but not necessarily an improvement.

Art moves, but does not advance; it develops but does not always improve. *Moll Flanders* one of the great English novels, perhaps the greatest.

The aristocrat is content to be known by his actions; but the bourgeois wants to be recognized by his intentions. His actions are usually very bad. And Moll Flanders was a pickpocket, an adulteress, a murderer, and guilty of incest, yet Defoe makes you feel she was essentially a good woman.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Leda

Leda release
The sensuous swan;
A god's caprice
Is quickly gone.

Through tangled reeds
The bird again
Slowly recedes
Into his brain.

Your loins still tremble
Behind your stare
Your mind must dissemble
His presence there.

The cleavage lies
Where the unknown
Fills the disguise
Of flesh and bone.

—W. WESLEY TRIMPI

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Notes on Faulkner and Flaubert

CAROLINE GORDON

CALLIMACHUS SAYS OF THE OLIVE LEAF:

> *The left side white as the belly of a water snake,*
> *the other, which is mostly exposed, smitten by the sun.*

The use of this kind of detail in contriving imaginative reality has been recommended by critics from the time of Aristotle and has been practised by writers as widely separated in time and space as Homer and Ernest Hemingway. Gustave Flaubert was the first fiction writer of modern times to bring a conscious purpose to the use of detail and to develop it into a technique.

It took him five years to write his naturalistic masterpiece, *Madame Bovary;* he was creating not a book but a method. His friend, Louis Bouilhet, had convinced him that the prose work of the future must concern itself with the daily lives of human beings rather than the monuments of antiquity, and had suggested that he take for his model Balzac, the arch-enemy of romanticism. When Flaubert finished writing *Bovary* he had excelled his master in so far as his natural gifts permitted; he was never as fertile as Balzac and his conceptions are not of the same titanic mould, but he became more proficient technically.

It is instructive to compare the opening paragraphs of *Le Père Goriot* with those of "Un Coeur Simple":

> Mme. Vauquer (née de Conflans) is an elderly person who, for the past forty years, has kept a lodging house in the Rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève, in the district between the Latin Quarter and the Faubourg Saint-Marcel. Her house (known in the neighbourhood as the Maison Vauquer) receives men and women, old and young, and no word has

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> ever been breathed against the establishment; but, at the same time, it must be said that as a matter of fact no young woman has been under her roof for thirty years, and that if a young man stays there for any length of time, it is a sure sign that his allowance is of the slenderest. In 1819, however, the time when this drama opens, there was an almost penniless young girl among Mme. Vauquer's boarders.

So writes Balzac, and in the next paragraph he risks a digression, in the shape of a discussion of the real nature of drama and of truth, before he goes on to say that "the lodging house is Mme. Vauquer's own property," and is still standing at the lower end of the Rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève, "just where the road slopes so sharply down to the Rue de l'Arbalète that wheeled traffic seldom passes that way, because it is so stony and steep."

One of the secrets of Balzac's great power is the care he lavishes on his backgrounds. Before the action starts in *Le Père Goriot* he has told us so much about Madame Vauquer's house that we can almost smell the *odeur de pension.* The scene, however, as in most of his other works, tends to stand still until a given moment, when the whole unwieldy mass, infused somehow with life, lumbers into motion and proceeds with the speed of an avalanche, to its destination. But in his first paragraph, Balzac dissipates the attention he has directed to Mme. Vauquer's house when he asks us to entertain two contradictory statements: the fact that no young woman has been under her roof in thirty years and that in 1819 a penniless young girl was among her boarders. (If the penniless young girl were to be the heroine the contradiction might serve to fix our attention on her, but the story is about Old Goriot.) Flaubert, on the other hand, rivets our attention on his heroine in his first sentence, and every succeeding sentence, every phrase, every word, indeed, every comma or pause for breath speeds the action towards its resolution:

> For half a century the good folk of Pont-l'Evêque had envied Madame Aubain her servant, Félicité.
>
> For a wage of a hundred francs a year she cooked and did all the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> work of the house, sewing, washing, ironing; she knew how to fatten up poultry, how to make butter; moreover, she remained loyal to her mistress, and her mistress was not an amiable person.

The two passages illustrate the differences in the methods of the two masters. Flaubert once remarked that when the good God makes a tree he does not exclaim over his achievement, he merely presents it for our contemplation. He would not have been satisfied with Balzac's description of the road sloping down to the Rue de l'Arbalète. He would have rendered its sharpness in terms of action. Balzac's phrase "wheeled traffic seldom passes that way" suggests action but doesn't develop it sufficiently; he feels impelled to add the adjectives "stony" and "steep." Flaubert would have shown us the wheels of the cart and the horse struggling.

Flaubert uses the five senses in much the same way that a painter uses colours. They are the palette from which he contrives his illusions of life. He rarely attempted to render a phenomenon by portraying only one of its aspects. If the sense of sight is the only sense appealed to, it will be appealed to more than once. In "Un Coeur Simple" Félicité recognizes Virginie among the communicants by her slender neck *and* devout bearing. More often, more than one sense is appealed to:

> On days when the weather was too hot they did not leave their sitting room. The dazzling radiance outside formed golden bars of sunlight between the shutters of the Venetian blinds. Not a sound was to be heard in the village. Not a soul stirred in the street below. This pervading silence intensified their feeling of restfulness. In the distance the hammers of the caulkers beat upon keels and the smell of tar was wafted upwards on the heavy air.

The physical universe is, for us, a complex of sensations. In such a passage one detail rests upon and sustains another. The sound of the caulkers' hammers comes more clearly to our ears because of the smell of tar in the heavy air.

Flaubert's achievement eluded the critics of his time, among

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them, Sainte-Beuve, who, after all (like many a modern metropolitan critic) had a weekly column to write. Few of the critics who came after Sainte-Beuve have known what Flaubert was about. In one of Henry James' penetrating "Notes on Novelists" there is considerable praise for Emil Faguet's current book on Flaubert, but in the end, James, using in his critical note the *coup de canon* that he used so often at the climax of a novel, intimates that it takes an artist to evaluate Flaubert's contribution to the craft of fiction. His statement might be amended: only a few artists have understood it well enough to build on it.

Among them is James himself, although he animadverted against Flaubert on occasion and always gave Balzac greater praise. When he speaks of a work as being "written" he is referring not to style as it is generally understood; he means that the details which make up the illusion are, as he would say, "rendered," not "reported." In short, he is describing the kind of detail one finds on every page of *Madame Bovary* or "Un Coeur Simple."

James carries Flaubert's conscious purpose a step farther. His details have the same solidity that Flaubert's have, but they are more *active*. Everything in a James novel *moves*. Even his houses, made up, like all matter, of quivering molecules, would not stand still long enough for Balzacian description.

The key to his method is to be found in his brilliant image of "The House of Fiction":

> The House of Fiction has in short not one window, but a million, every one of which has been pierced or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will. These apertures, of dissimilar shape and size, are but windows at the best, mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life . . . at each of them stands a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least a field glass, which forms, again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, insuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other. . . .
>
> The spreading field, the human scene is 'the choice of subject'; the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> pierced aperture, either broad or balconied or slit-like and low-browed, is 'the literary form.' But they are, singly or together, as nothing without the posted presence of the watcher—without, in other words, the consciousness of the artist.

In Flaubert sensuous *perceptions* rest upon and sustain one another. James' *characters* exist, so to speak, *in terms of one another.* Everything in a James novel is seen through the eyes of one of the characters. This interaction gives the scenes a life-like quality—if we think of life as primarily movement or the capacity for movement—which no other writer has been able to achieve, for the very act of perceiving is made part of the drama. In "The Beast in the Jungle" John Marcher's thoughts, emotions and sensations are the actors, his consciousness the stage. But this circumscribing of the stage does not limit our view of "the spreading field." We see the world, too, as much of it, at least, as can be mirrored in the consciousness of one man, which is all that any of us can take in at one time. James has so maneuvered "the watcher at the window" that he contributes to the illusion of life, speeds up the action, rather than halts it.

The achievement of the one master rests upon that of the other. Both achievements are decisive contributions to the fundamental problem that confronts the fiction writer: the creation of more and more life-like illusions. The achievements of Flaubert and James constitute a challenge to all fiction writers who have come after them. Among contemporary American writers William Faulkner seems to have responded most fully to this challenge.

In his novels "the watcher at the window" is actor as well as watcher, but in accomplishing this end Faulkner is more like Flaubert than James. His fundamental method—his "groundwork"—is an extension of the method Flaubert used. Writing, with a tact—or a good fortune—rare in these days, about scenes he has known intimately since childhood, he has accomplished what Flaubert himself longed to accomplish, the union of concrete historical detail with lyricism. His temperament inclines

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him to poetic images and rhetorical flights but the "underpinnings" of his structure are substantial enough to sustain them. In Faulkner at his best the reader subscribes at every turn to the illusion, and the narrator, freed from the constant obligation to convince, can, as it were, pause on occasion for comment. The comment usually adds another *activity* to the scene, giving it, in the end, a larger dimension than Flaubert was able to achieve. In Faulkner's story, "Spotted Horses," Mrs. Henry Armistid appears to the spectators as "a gray and blasted tree trunk, moving, somehow intact and upright, upon an unhurried flood." Mrs. Armistid, when we first see her, is wearing garments that are gray, shapeless and limp from age, work stains and frequent washings. The *grayness* and the *unmovingness* of her garments have been so apparent in every glimpse we have had of her that it takes no effort to see her as a gray and blasted tree trunk being borne along on a slow flood. We realize that that is what she has been all along. We are only now seeing her in her true light.

In passages like this almost always the image-in-the-round is so placed and timed—so well joined on—that it seems to complete the structure we have been observing. And this addition of another facet causes a further revolution of the thing-observed, contributing powerfully to the illusion of life, of *action*.

"Spotted Horses" will bear comparison with "Un Coeur Simple." It does not come as near perfection in form—there is a flaw in its structure—but it is a question whether it is not, on the whole, a more significant story; it attains the same degree of dramatic objectivity and the action takes place on a larger stage and is more powerful dramatically.

Both are stories of a simple heart and its relations to supernatural forces. The life of Flaubert's heroine follows the same pattern as that of the early Christians. She renounces worldly joys and undergoes many of the trials that they underwent, confronts wild beasts (when she saves Madame Aubain and her children from an enraged bull), comforts the sick and the dying (Père Comiche, with his cancerous sores, bears a marked resemblance to the lepers to whom the early Christians ministered)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and is scourged (when, as she is on her way to St. Gatien's, carrying the basket that contains the dead Loulou, a passing carter's whip lashes her "round stomach and neck so violently that she fell on her back.") "She took consolation for her own wound in contemplating the bird"—the most beautiful object that has come into her life. As the reward of her virtue—and her innocence—the Holy Ghost appears to her when she is dying, in the form of the parrot she has so loved in life.

Faulkner's simple heart—that of Mrs. Henry Armistid—is shown in conflict with the Devil and his allies, and the Devil wins.

The story is told from the viewpoint of the omniscient narrator. Only a master is able to achieve immediacy by the use of this method, and many a master has come to grief in the attempt. Balzac's story, "The Executioner" is unforgettable but not wholly satisfying. One believes that the members of the family of the Marquis de Legañes met death with extraordinary composure; one is not convinced that their heads were cut off. "Clara's white neck seems to appeal to the blade to fall," but when the blade falls no blood seems to flow. Balzac, who always moved ponderously, is not close enough to his scene.

In "The Spotted Horses" the omniscient narrator is himself so passionate an observer that he does not need to view the scenes through the eyes of any of the characters; whatever he reports carries conviction. The Texan, backing a pony into a corner, hammering its head with the butt of his pistol or grasping its forelock with one hand, its nostrils with the other, and wringing its "long, evil muzzle" back over its shoulder, is repeating desperate, unerring movements that men have sat on fences to watch for generations. A Southern tenant farmer (if he were not "bemused" by Faulkner's rhetoric!) could find no flaw in his knowledge of country ways. Henry Armistid's wagon wheel is repaired the way a man of his kind and condition repairs wagon wheels in Faulkner's country, "with crossed planks, bound to the spokes with baling wire." Mrs. Armistid's canvas gymnasium shoes seem ridiculous, worn with her gray and shapeless garments: even her despair is not allowed its due dignity; it is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her fate to be always at the mercy of some grotesque mischance.

This kind of mastery comes as the result of lifelong devotion to a particular scene. The writer must contemplate the objects or persons described over a period of years, at all times of year, in all kinds of weather, before he can unerringly select the aspect which will convey its essence. Flaubert was eminently successful at this as long as he stayed on his (to him so detestable) home ground. Every blade of grass, every cobblestone in "Un Coeur Simple" has the air of reality. He used the same method of attack in "Herodias" but the incidents do not carry the same conviction. He was not himself convinced of the brute fact that Saint John the Baptist's head had ever lain on a salver, and so could not convince us.

The speeches of Faulkner's characters contribute powerfully to the effect of verisimilitude. When the wild ponies rush into the open run-way of the stable and bring up at the farther wall with a "hollow, thunderous sound like that of a collapsing mine-shaft," the Texan says, "Seems to have held all right." His dramatic understatements—"I misdoubted that shelled corn all along," "Well, well, well. So this is it"—reveal the shattered spirit behind the brittle, as yet impenetrable surface. Mrs. Armistid voices hopelessness: "He ain't no more despair than to buy one of them things. And us not but five dollars away from the poor house, he ain't no more despair." The men, sitting on the porch after supper, talk of other western horses they have known: "Anse McCollum made a good team outen them two of hisn. They was a little light. That was all. . . . When a man don't have to invest so much into a horse or team he don't need so much from them." The very cadences announce their "stubborn, convinced and passive" advance into the trap.

Ratliff, the sewing machine agent, and Mrs. Littlejohn, the boarding house keeper, represent the enveloping action of the story and serve as foils to the others, reminding us that it is possible for human beings to think intelligently and act wisely. Mrs. Littlejohn stands with her hands on her hips, amazed, or turns her head away when the spectacle of the men's folly becomes too

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

much for her but keeps her head when she confronts one of the maddened beasts running through her own hall, "dividing her washboard neatly on the long mad face." The speech in which Ratliff recounts what went on between Mrs. Armistid and Mrs. Littlejohn, when Mrs. Littlejohn finds out that Flem Snopes won't give Mrs. Armistid her money back, is one of the least successful passages in the story, the one place where Faulkner has failed to solve the problem of authority. Ratliff is here trying to convey the emotions of other persons, Mrs. Littlejohn, Mrs. Armistid and later Mrs. Armistid's daughter. The passage is not dramatic in itself and comes near collapsing under the narrative weight it has to bear, but for the most part Ratliff is successful in his role of Greek chorus to the madmen's antics, even foretelling, as a chorus often does, what is about to happen.

The enveloping action is twofold. The Devil also makes his comments. "Well, it's a good bright cool night for running them," old Jody Varner, Flem Snopes' father-in-law, remarks as the madmen swarm over the countryside in pursuit of the spotted horses. He explains that such madness is salutary: "A night like this one, when a man ain't old enough to lay still and sleep, and yet he ain't young enough to go tomcattin in and out of other folks' back windows, something like this is good for him." His own daughter, Eula, Flem Snopes' wife, was begotten on such a night:

> I mind when me and Mrs. Varner was expecting Eula. Already had a mess of children and maybe we ought to quit then. But I wanted some more gals. Others had done married and moved away, and a passel of boys, soon as they get big enough to be worth anything, they ain't got time to work. Got to set around the store and talk. But a gal will stay home and work until she does get married. So there was a old woman told my mammy once that if a woman showed her belly to the full moon after she had done caught, it would be a gal. So Mrs. Varner taken and laid every night with the moon on her nekkid belly, until it fulled and after. I could lay my ear to her belly and hear Eula kicking and scourging like all get-out, feeling the moon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The passage in which this Helen, "returned to what topless and shoddy Argos," stands blank-eyed at the window in her white garments, "not doomed, just damned," "waiting for no one" is poorly written—a flight that failed—but the passage serves the story structurally. Flem Snopes, who is in league with the Prince of Darkness, must have a moon woman for wife.

This is a remarkably skilful use of the device which James called "under-cutting." As a mountain peak is defined by its valleys, Flem Snopes is revealed through his followers. His own face is mask-like, his few remarks are ritual: "Gentlemen," as he steps up on the porch on his return from Texas—or factual: "Them ain't my horses." He reveals himself most fully through the mouth of one of his followers. When one of his listeners asks him if what he has said about the moon is "true sho enough," Old Jody Varner looks out from under slanting brows and gives way—as a lesser Devil's disciple, Lump Snopes, the clerk, has given way at intervals throughout the story—to Mephistophelean mirth over human credulity.

Faulkner rounds out his picture of Flem Snopes by an adroit use of "psychic distance," which is represented often by physical space. When Flem stands at the fence to watch the horses cavort nobody stands directly beside him. Wherever he goes there is always a little space cleared about him. The omniscient narrator does not lead the reader inside this magic circle. Flem leaves the story as he entered it, a man of mystery. But the triumph of evil is complete. The Texan is ruined, adrift in the world, Henry Armistid's leg is broken, his wife has lost the heart that might have enabled her to make the crop he cannot make, Tull has lost two young mules. Everybody who has had anything to do with the horses has suffered—except the Devil's Disciples—and in the end, Justice itself raises its hands to Heaven:

"I can't stand no more," the old judge cries, "I won't! This court's adjourned. Adjourned!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Oklahoma

Under autumn's soft gas-lamps
Young men are dealing cards;
Casual whispering of hands
Unaccompanied by words;
I watch the hands as in a dream
Without an end, or pause.
Window-rattling windstorms come
To flicker out the lights,
But they continue playing
Without effect or cause,
Slowly accustomed to the dark,
All glow gone but what moon
Is echoed by their rings
Like fireflies in the room.
I can't imagine anything
More hypnotically immune
Than this intensive shuffling
That turns its back on doom,
Day, noon, night, all storm
And snowblind winter coming on.

—JAMES LOVETT

To Morfudd

Who made an ache under my rib
whom I love and have loved
whose colour God made
whose forehead's a white flower
to whom God gave red gold
her hair a tongue of gold
her neck of straight growth
her breasts full spheres

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

two scarlet sunny cheeks
her brows of London black
her eyes bright enclosures
her nose of a sweet girl.
Her smile the five delights
her body, white as Saint Anne,
in beauty takes me from God
her shape and fair hue
how fond under fine-tressed roof.
Beauty, come to the hillside
our bed be high on the hill
a long age under birches
the mattress of green leaves
valanced with brilliant ferns
shielded from beating rain
by coverlet of trees.
I shall lie as David lay,
brave prophet, until daylight.
Solomon's father made
before the dawn seven psalms.
I shall make if I am met
psalms of the kisses of love
seven kisses from a girl
seven birchtrees over the grave
seven vespers seven masses
seven sermons of the thrush
seven litanies under the leaves
seven nightingales seven rods
seven accents of free delight
seven diadems seven odes
seven odes to slim Morfudd
sprightly of body and seventy more.
Thus she'll no more lock up
the rent that's due to love.

—GWYN WILLIAMS

from the Welsh of Dafydd ap Gwilym. 14th Century.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The White Hound

WARD DORRANCE

THE DOOR OPENED SLOWLY, revealing a section of blond parquet. Ronald set his bags down and pressed a wall button. A lamp dimly lighted a small, stark white entry hall which opened immediately into a drawing room through an arch flanked by plain columns. Beside the lamp, on the same table, a gold oval tray held a gray correspondence card with a message in thick white ink. Leaning over, Ronald read: "Dining at Archer's. Home by ten. Mary."

He halted near where he knew the drawing room lamp to be and reached for the chain. As the light came on, he looked back over his shoulder at the mantel clock.

"Nine twenty-seven," he said aloud.

He stood a moment, rolling the flesh of his cleft chin together between his thumb and forefinger, narrowing his lashes against the gold, black and popcorn white of the room. Its brightness hurt his eyes after the dark plane ride. Its spotlessness increased the discomfort of his wilted collar, his damp armpits, his rumpled trousers. Its solidity, by contrast, quickened the sensation of swaying, of sudden drop and wavering recovery, which was still with him from the plane.

Letting his hands fall to his sides, he walked to the black divan and slowly seated himself on its white upholstery. He felt slightly ill, as he had felt in the plane when short, vertical drops had made it seem that his scalp remained in place while a weight

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in his stomach stretched his torso down. Leaning back, he let his eye travel to the painting over the fireplace which showed a deep-hearted lily, petals reflexed, with gold anthers poised on foreshortened stalks. The frame was black. An ebony electric clock rested on the mantel below.

He moved to the right arm of the divan and, as if absent-mindedly, thrust a finger into the ear of a porcelain cat on the smoking table. Looking down, he examined the web of cracks in the creature's head, not to see them, but to avoid the clock. It was watching the door for Mary's entry.

She would be coming in a moment. In a moment her skirt would fill the doorway and rustle through it. She would be bare-shouldered and have no hat, in black lace, in white satin, or sheathed like a mermaid in gold sequins. She would smell of the cold night air, of carnation perfume and green chartreuse. She would come soundlessly over the deep white nap of the rug, brightly inquiring.

"And how shall I tell her?" he asked.

He swallowed, and turned his head from side to side. He must first, he told himself, collect the facts as he recalled them before the billiard shot that had dispersed them, though the answer did not lie in their mere realignment. Some he could discount at once. There was nothing significant in his business trip while it remained a business trip. However, business had been over when he met Pomfret in the country drug store. It would take showing to convince Mary, but there had been something in that moment; something on which the rest had turned. Why had he, for instance, gone home with a loosely apparented "cousin" because the man, opening his mouth to ask for a pack of Camels, exclaimed instead: "Why Cousin Ronald! Seems like we might have had word!"

They had stood a moment, because of the surprise, smiling with more delight than either felt, while the old druggist, to make room for his elbows on the counter, moved a card of pocket combs so that it overlapped a card of breath-refreshers, and pushed aside a dusty pheasant from which one button-eye had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dropped. He looked alertly from man to man, though neither answered when he asked: "You gentlemen some kin?"

Pomfret then reached into his pocket for change, counted out the right number of pennies for the tax, and took up his cigarettes.

"You've put on weight," he said to Ronald.

"Can't say the same for you," Ronald told him, and Pomfret, grinning, shook his head.

He was tall, spare and soft-spoken, with the profile and port of a public leader in the last century, but vacantly, comically or pathetically—here among displays of perfumes and alarm clocks—as if he had either inherited a senator's nose without his force, or had been born a Moses in a day of air-cooled bars. He was a lawyer (of sorts, Ronald had thought, seeing his outward look of needing a tiding over): he lived on a "home place" with Helen, a pretty wife Ronald had remembered, and a little son born since Ronald's last visit. Ronald had gone with him, he now decided, because of the concentric circles around the dropped word "cousin," and because he was pleased by Pomfret's phrase "we should have had word." He had forgot that his country kin spoke of news as if it came by smoke signals, or runners staggering from a wood.

There was nothing in the black drive home, past shapes of peach and pecan trees, to chill the warmth of re-union, or, for Ronald, to check the excess of his condescension in humouring a decent fellow. When they turned in an avenue and the headlights finally—the distance seemed improbable—caught the feet of oyster-coloured columns, Ronald held his breath to see what he had also forgot; that these old houses could be so big.

Pomfret entered the circle which ended the avenue, stopped before a gate and switched off the lights. Both dismounted. Ronald stood, with his chin up like a blind man, breathing the night air. It was chill on the skin of his nostrils and sharp with the smell of wood smoke. Pomfret walked around the car and led him to a gate which grated open at Pomfret's touch and, when they had gone through, was pulled back by the weight of plough points on a chain. Above their flat tinkle Ronald heard

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the latch click like a pistol hammer. He followed Pomfret toward the house, shuffling over the uneven bricks of the walk, feeling for each of the gallery steps until a negro opened the front door and he could advance, blinking but confident, into a great lighted hall. He noted that Pomfret, having allowed the butler to take their coats, courteously helped him store them. The man was very old.

Then, gaily offering aid himself, Ronald opened the drawing room door, which first stuck. His smile faded and his eyes grew wide as it receded, showing a chamber of sculptured chestnut, garnet-upholstered, watered by a dappling of prisms. His hostess was rising from a hearth bench. She stood bare shouldered in blue silk, mildly there, as if under the tissue of a frontispiece, taking time to recognize his youth in his middle age before she brought off, more by an effect of acoustics than volume, a "Cousin Ronald!" He started toward her, needing to see her only, but aware that he stepped, on the balls of his feet, over a rug worn shallow in the open, deep under self-supporting colonies of tables (one of them fringed to the floor) each with its complement of lamps, keepsakes, chairs, loveseats, all tufted, braided, *galonnés*. He took her elbows and kissed her like an inexperienced boy, catching only the corner of her mouth, relieved as if, on her borrowed faith, he had crossed water afoot.

Pomfret came up behind him, went around him and stood by Helen. They smiled like the end couple of a halted cotillion, best visible because last dead, seeming to think it easy for Ronald to play the guest. He tried. But he started on seeing the child.

It—he thought "it" instantly, in deference to its tininess as if to its Excellency or Grace—was four or five years old; a boy. He stood square-shouldered, contained, rehearsed, among the folds of his nurse's skirt in the door of a second parlour, lined with mirrors between engaged columns. He stepped out evenly at some signal of the woman's, neither toddling nor shy, in such mimicry of the advancing *padrone* that Ronald had first to put down a strained amusement, as if he had seen a kitten in a doll's hat. He did so quickly, corrected less by the repetition in perfection of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the parents' welcome than by the timbre of the child's "Good evening." It made him start, as if he had been addressed by a fox in a path, and, squatting on his heels, he pulled the boy toward him. The boy came, but standing at Ronald's knee, he turned his head away, embarrassed or resentful, Ronald was not sure which. Ronald released him at once and rose, but he had seen that the baby face was haggard with grown-up woe.

The parents said nothing. Ronald, too, was silent, and the butler entered with sherry. It was dark, long-steeped, and spent its strength as on a target.

While he drank Ronald watched the child (blond, pink, "angelic" in the medical sense, he thought), how he chose not a small but a great chair with an urn spilling grapes and pomegranates between rampant griffins on its carved back. It stood under a wall sconce of prisms in a kind of heraldic device. He pulled himself up by a bract of acanthus terminating the arm and sat, legs apart, with (at first sight) the spleen of baby dukes at ceremonies. But Ronald, seeing him repeatedly bite his lips, felt doubly sure that he had, for this occasion, set aside a grief. He sensed the parents' shared relief when dinner was announced.

The dining room lay vast, for its small party, under a chandelier of crystal rope and pendants, wainscotted shoulder high, with space, between plate rail and ceiling, for three life-size portraits. The gold bottoms of the frames, the feet of the sitters (one a lady with tiny shoes) shone waveringly in the light of candles on the table.

As he ate, Ronald stole sharper glances at his hosts. The wife's gown was frayed at the armpit, stained in one place by its rusty hooks, and so *décolleté* as to seem about to give her the formal licence of a shepherdess in a print. This, with her husband's string-tied look of having at some time run for office, contrasted drily with their: "Well I'll declare!" at some remark of his. They conversed in the easy phrases of grammars, chiefly about old servants. Once, as the hostess ended an anecdote telling how she, then a bride, had taken a bowl of lard and flour to the cabin so that Aunt Frony the cook, approaching childbirth, might mix the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

biscuit dough in bed, moaning for the helpless lambs, she concluded: "Poor Frony, dead these years, God have her soul!" At that moment there came, from beyond the candle light, an "Amen, Miss Helen, ma'am."

It was the old butler. His words, thrown off in a turning about his serving table, were meant, Ronald saw, not as an interruption nor a personal comment, but an alto enriching his lady's note. They all lived for the same thing.

Ronald examined the man as he came into the light with a tray of ices. He was touching, sure enough, with his shuffle and his lichen-coloured wool and his quiet captaincy of the room. But how long, Ronald wondered, watching his hostess lay the wishbone of a quail on her plate while her husband, waiting, ran a finger around the rim of his wine glass, how long will these unsuspecting folk hold out, when their few old darkies go?

That night he was restless before he slept, knowing that he lay under an absurdly high cliff of rosewood headpiece and that the room they had given him smelled, as his mother's rooms had smelled, of orris, lavender and dusty carpet. It was the odour, or one of the odours, of the past; a past that had been already long past when he was a boy.

A moon had risen on the far side of the house, spreading enough diffused light to prove that he might have guessed what was in the room before he saw it, from memory of others like it. He rolled his head toward the window.

To the left he made out a wash stand, with bowl and pitcher; to the right a dresser with a brush, a bay rum bottle and a painted china box with a hole in the lid to receive the combings of a woman's hair. Above it a mirror stood some five feet high, with branching sconces. The crest of its frame was two-pitched over a pediment, topped by a shell-shaped ornament. The glass dully gathered what light there was—enough to reflect the dark oval of a portrait and the loop of a rose-back chair by the hall door.

There was nothing else but a mammoth wardrobe and the bed Ronald lay in.

He looked up. The headpiece was all of twelve feet high and the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

foot, he saw, looking down, was a full third of that. The width of the mattress was in proportion. From the middle, his outstretched hand did not quite reach the edge. His toes made a ridge oddly close to his chin, under the covers.

He shut his eyes. The clearest of the thoughts that held him from sleep was that the bed was first of all not a resting place but rather, literally, a *meuble de famille*. It was built for legal acts, to be recorded on headstones and the fly-leaves of Bibles. His casual, single presence in it fretted and embarrassed him, as if he had been tricked into sharing a dubious prank. A prank played upon whom? he asked. Was anyone there? No man, no woman; no. But the big hollow room was solidly there. The hall outside it led to the stair and the stair to the parlour where old mistresses had yielded to the young, each with her thimble of wine and lace-edged napkin. From there the way led back through an enfilade of neutral mirrors to a kitchen where copper pots on the wall shone in the light from lifted stove lids.

One thing at least, Ronald thought, was sure. This house should have gone with other landmarks of his youth. But here it was, huge and valid, resonant, fragrant, lived in. It demanded, he felt persistently, a statement of blamelessness from him. The proportions of its rooms, the deep embrasures of its windows, its random floor boards and serpentine stair all seemed to inquire why he had gone, where he had been and if he had waxed fat upon his treason? What had he to show for twenty childless years with Mary? What but his share in the accounts of Collins-McComber, Dunbar and Steinmetz?

This, he thought, eyeing the shapes of the dresser and wardrobe, and the window's rectangle of skimmed-milk light, was largely an effect of the country night. He would leave in the morning and shake it off.

It did not happen so, and not alone because he had forgot that there was no train before eleven-twenty.

He was awakened by a scream. It caught him while he was not sure that it was light or where he was, and before his muscles could relax, he heard words:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Sho he daid. They th'ow lime down he grave hole."

The voice was boyish and negro. It did not go on. Ronald heard running feet, a slap, and a woman (the nurse, no doubt): "You Hinry, git! What you doin' in Mr. Junius' room?" And there was a third voice—Pomfret's—saying: "Junius! Junius! This is father!"

Ronald rose, shaved with cold water since, in the confusion, no one remembered to bring him hot, and found his way to the front stair. Pomfret was standing in the hall below looking up, lowering his head as Ronald descended, his lips forming the first words he wished to speak. Ronald, smiling, stopped him with: "I know. I heard. Something's happened."

"Then you see we're in a little trouble with the boy," Pomfret said, relieved.

Ronald did not answer. Pomfret was holding the front door open for him. They took chairs behind the columns on the gallery and sat silent, Pomfret with his legs crossed, staring down at cracks on the stone floor; Ronald with his chin on his hands, elbows on his knees, looking off over the country. The sky was heavily overcast.

Past the uneven rural lawn, edged with overgrown shrubs, an avenue of cedars descended to the road. Beyond that, the clean rows of a pecan grove mounted a slope and dipped. There was then a valley of some breadth. Trees at the next rise were appreciably smaller to the eye than those at the break of the roll, and the far rows resumed their line a little to the right of the near.

Ronald kept his mind from straying to the scene and held himself ready to turn to Pomfret, when Pomfret decided to speak.

But Pomfret, gazing up now at the sky, delayed.

"It's warmish and going to snow," he finally murmured, and sat up straight with such resolution that Ronald looked at him quickly.

"I'd better tell you about it," he said, and Ronald nodded.

He heard then that a man, Rob Garland, had been hanged the day before, for stabbing a farm hand to death at a dance. He was a poor-white, though the term hardly fit, Pomfret said. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was bolder than most, poor not so much from shiftlessness but because he chose to live by his rifle, refusing to work except in season, as a guide to city hunters. He had got on the good side of the baby, Junius, by stopping to talk with him as he crossed the place.

"The kid thought everything of him," Pomfret said.

Ronald shrugged. "You know how it is when a grown man notices a boy."

He saw Garland as a type who would wear a "ruby"-studded belt and smell of gun oil—occasionally of green hides—and have, now and then, a fish scale in the hair on the back of his hand.

"Garland stopped to play with him whenever he saw him," Pomfret was going on.

"A real visit," Ronald thought, "no fraud nor condescension. Probably he always found something in his pocket: a monkey carved from a peach seed, the skull of a bird in a wad of cotton, a vial of fox urine to sprinkle on leaves around a trap."

"Milly is a white cur," Pomfret was saying. "Pink-rimmed eyes, but not an albino's exactly. . . ."

Ronald smiled.

"It bothered Helen. Junie'd keep saying things like: 'Rob says if a calf's low sick you bring it to by rubbing its tail with cobs.' " Pomfret hesitated. "Nothing ugly," he went on, when Ronald let him catch his eye, "just common, and it got on Helen's nerves. He'd say such stuff and look at us, licking the back of his spoon. . . ."

"Judging you, maybe," Ronald thought. "Trying to name his sense of the contrast between the man's vitality and your gentility."

". . . but he took it hard when she wouldn't let him see Rob and Lord knows what we'll do now. It was bad enough telling him Rob was dead, before the little nigger got at him this morning."

Ronald nodded and glanced back at the front door, hearing a bell.

"Come on," Pomfret said. "Seems like it's time to eat."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ronald followed slowly. He remembered now that in the brief walk through the parlours to the table, his mind had considered two things, seemingly unrelated. It happened in a flash, but took time to tell.

There was on the one hand, on re-entering the rooms, the impression of submitting himself again to the teasing of their secret, as if he were in an abandoned ship, adrift intact, with food on the table and, in the air, a whisk of last motion. He wished again to protest that he had not deserted (that was the word which occurred); or, if he had deserted, it had been to a victor whose discipline was punishment enough.

Simultaneously there was his sympathy for the boy, Junius. He recalled how he, at the same age, had been told his dog was dead, and how he had tried to understand when his mother had said that no he would never, that is, not ever, see Lige again.

The two themes were unrelated, but he saw now that they fed on one another. The house set atavisms in motion, quickening his perception of the boy's anguish. And the anguish, his own by contagion, robbed him of the detachment in which he could see an atavism as no more important than a twinge of rheumatism.

When he reached the dining room door, he put everything out of mind except a wish to help. The boy was standing on a bath towel on the waxed hearth bricks, tiny, unclad, pink between the high brass andirons, before the chimney where the flames stood quietly striving in grooves of the blackened throat. His mother, on her knees, was wringing a cloth in the steam of a basin held by the nurse.

"It seemed better to bathe him here," she said without looking up, and he received her rinsing and drying, holding up an arm, extending a foot, as unconcerned for his nakedness as an old nobleman whose station entitled him to move, even during the toilette, as if the servants were not there.

"An *old* nobleman," Ronald thought, because the child's face was nearly as simian in its pucker as that of the butler, who entered with the coffee for which they sat.

The child, in a nightgown and little striped robe, was placed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

opposite Ronald. Ronald saw that there was no rescuing him, no lowering of adult salvage gear to the ledge where he had fallen. No one spoke of him or to him; but all, parents, guest, butler and hovering nurse, looked only at him when they raised their eyes. He sat quietly without eating, examining his nails, staring off through the window, as able, evidently, since the ruin was total, to sit there as elsewhere. But toward the end of the meal, when he gasped and stiffened against his chair, Pomfret threw down his napkin.

He circled the table and took the child's hands.

"Junie," he said. "You know Trail and Muse and all Daddy's dogs?"

The baby nodded, sucking in his breath.

"How'd it be if we took 'em out for a race? Cousin Ronald will come with us. There'll be time," he said, turning to Ronald. "You have three hours before your train."

While the women zippered Junius into a red woolen snow suit, one piece complete, from helmet to toe, Pomfret got Ronald into old khaki pants and a hunting coat. It was the first time in years that he had had on less than a good shop's best.

Out of doors, Pomfret carried the child in his arms and Ronald managed to keep up, stumbling on the uneven pasture turf. Meanwhile the hounds exuberantly came and went, one showing its rump and upturned tail as it leaped away, another its wet protruding tongue as it bounded back. When he could lift his eyes from a smooth stretch, Ronald watched them. Once, stopping to glance back, he saw that only the roof and chimneys of the house were visible. Pomfret was leading them down a slope, with outcroppings of rock, toward a little valley.

He kept up questions as they walked, to divert the boy.

"Junius," he said, "look at Drum, lifting his leg against the weed over there. You know he's Muse's grandson? You know he wouldn't stop for a rabbit, even on a bright night?"

But the boy laid his face against Pomfret's lapel and would not answer.

The way now led across flat ground to a creek. Before a back-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

drop of timber, a bare knoll stood. Eaten in half by freshets, it showed, in cross section, a hump of dark top soil, thinning to a layer of clay studded with scattered stones. At the left a fallen dogwood sapling lay, combing the water. To the right a wood rose behind graduated foothills of second growth brush. Ronald saw that the knoll was a stage. The hunt would pass over it.

On the near bank, where they stood, the land close to the stream was pocked by the feet of cattle. The tracks nearest the water were filled with seepage. There was a good deal of manure about and the odour in the open, Ronald noticed, was not unpleasant. Pomfret halted some fifty feet back from the bank, just beyond the branches of a pin oak. The tree's dry foliage, clinging long after frost, gave out a thin rattle, though Ronald scarcely felt a stir of air.

Pomfret then began to build a fire. He made much of the way to set it, asking Junius for dead grass to wad under a tepee of twigs, letting him light the match, showing him a rooster-comb of flame that suddenly stood up from the smudge.

All three held their hands to it a moment without speaking, while the hounds went off, closely huddled, about their business. Pomfret squatted on the balls of his feet, his arms crossed on his knees, with Junius pressing close against him, and Ronald sat down awkwardly, careful, from habit, of the crease in his trousers. He felt the chill, unequal ground beneath them, and now and then he reached under one hip or the other to remove a pebble or a piece of bark.

After a while, as Pomfret was whispering that the cry might break, it broke: a *yowl-it, yowl-it, yowl-it* in four parts.

"At the old home place," he said happily, motioning for Ronald to see how the glaze of disinterest had left the boy's eyes.

"Grandmother Alastairs's?" the child asked.

"Uh-h'm. You know the fox has got his hole under the door stone."

Pomfret finished in a whisper, guiding the boy by the shoulders to show him. A red fox was capping the knoll across the creek. It loped up, over, down and out of sight in the brush, easily,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as if in some ineluctable path, like a duck in a shooting gallery. Presently the hounds broke out of the dead weeds to the left of the knoll. They raced across it, but to the right of it; somehow tricked, they moved apart in overlapping circles, whining.

It had begun to snow. A few flakes dropped at first, each traceable below a given level of the solid gray above; each rocking alertly on its small axis. Then the fall thickened until the wood opposite showed through a curtain of ragged dots. They blinked soundlessly from sight on the creek, pocking the surface. They hissed in the fire and rolled into balls of lint a moment on the ground before they melted. The baby picked some from a withered umbrel of Queen Anne's lace near the level of his eye and touched it to his lips, smiling.

"It tastes like rain, Daddy," he said.

Pomfret, to please him, reached to get some too, but at that moment, without warning, a single cry broke from the four hounds. Ronald jumped to his feet. Pomfret gathered the boy to him.

"Watch Muse outheel 'em!" he shouted, as the pack darted away to the right. And when it was gone, he "watched" the hunt by its silences and tongueing, detailing it aloud to hold the boy's attention. Once, as the cry came after a long interval, his chin went up.

"There's a strange hound running," he said.

"How can you tell?" Ronald asked.

Pomfret frowned and held up his hand. Ronald closed his eyes and in a moment stretched them wide. He had heard a long *ai-oo* above the chop-mouthed cry of Pomfret's hounds. Pomfret nodded at him rapidly, then looked away, seeing that Ronald did not understand. Both, moreover, were watching the boy.

Junius had advanced a little from the fire and faced left, clutching the breast of his snow suit, breathing through his mouth so that Ronald heard him over the crackle of burning sticks.

In a moment the fox parted the stems of deerberry to the left and, free of obstructions, made across the knoll, this time intent and quick. Its brush was low. The hounds were thudding close

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

behind. Pomfret seized his horn and blew it so close, so loud, that Ronald lowered his head and put his hands to his ears.

The hounds came into sight at once; five, not four. The first was a white cur, yellowish in the new snow, speeding purposefully, business-like, not even triumphant, impersonally riding her legs.

Pomfret's pack wheeled across the creek. The first hound waded straight across. The second and third stopped to lap. The fourth halted to lower himself in the shallows, panting. The intruder went on with the hunt alone, then, while her thrashing through the woods could still be heard, there had come the squeal, the scream which Ronald had kept hearing in the plane from Atlanta.

At its loudest, it stopped. There was the sound of trotting in dead leaves as the hound came back to join them, but no one moved until she crossed the knoll with a red fur in her mouth, its pointed nose limply catching on the stubble. Then Ronald swallowed and saw Pomfret give the boy his hand without looking down. They watched her slide off the bank in a dribbling of gravel that broke up her reflection as she waded in and struck deep water. It did not surprise her. She snapped for a better hold on the fox, then swam toward them, showing her skull at the tip of a lengthening wake.

Her pink-rimmed eyes, Ronald suddenly thought, were the colour of hulled grapes.

She walked from the shallows stiffly and humped her back and shook herself. The fox's head lolled like a gourd in the foot of a stocking. She dropped him and lay down by the fire a little way off from the blooded hounds. They watched her, but made no motion toward her. She looked about her genially, placing her right paw over the fox's brush. Otherwise she paid it no heed even when, delicately, it began to arch its back and its legs stiffened and the white of one eye appeared and the jaws opened and closed noiselessly before it lay quiet, a pulse still beating in the sunken triangle at the joint of hind leg and spine.

No one spoke. Afterward Ronald remembered how the two men had time to look at one another, Pomfret with the comfort,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this time, that Ronald understood, before Junius took a step toward the white hound. Both put out a hand to stop him. Both let him fall. He lay with his face to the ground, one shoulder hunched above the other, digging at the earth with the toe of one foot as Ronald had seen men do, shot on island beaches.

That had been all there was to it. They carried the child to the house and called the doctor, and before he came Pomfret drove Ronald to the train. Helen left Junius with his nurse for the moment it took to follow them to the car. She reminded Ronald that his wife had never visited them. "You all come!" she managed to call, as Pomfret started the motor.

There had been the train ride to Atlanta, a taxi to the plane; the plane with its tilted horizons, La Guardia and a second cab, and the elevator with its door gliding back a moment after one thought it ought.

All that, surely, should have shaken him free. But here in the chic, bone-clean Town and Country room, snow was falling, broad, loose flakes making fish eyes, dropping past the lamp. Ronald was suddenly aware—he had not heard her enter—that his wife had come in from dinner, in satin, white unless he saw it yellow amid the whiter flakes. He watched the movement of her knees grow faster under the rustling cloth as she came forward, arms outstretched, and saw the genial welcome of her eyes darken with misgiving as he rose to kiss her, but in answer to her question: "Are you ill?" he guardedly said no, he thought he was just tired.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tombstone Man

You so outstood in full perfunction
All casual monument and crest,
You trafficked at the graveyard junction,
Carving out the marble zones of rest.

Outfitter to the credulous,
Treasurer of dust,
Your chisel, flagrant, sedulous,
Elaborates a crystal crust.

O prince, O thanker, can you wear
The princely habiliments of stone,
The gowns of heavy state that flare
Their marble drapery round the bone?

Colossal as at Rhodes you drew
The aimless commerce through your gate,
Interned the silly gasping crew,
And spaced them in your denser state.

But where, alas, can bone find rest
That wrestles in a shapely tomb,
And where can putrefaction test
The porous layers of your bloom?

Transit then your sliding zones
And find meridian, O prince and plume;
Survey the densities of stone,
Installed beside the shifting moon,

And as in zenith you rejoice,
Elucidate the trembling tombs,
And stir the hidden pools of voice
That slumber in your marble rooms.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Poems to the Three Noble Ladies

To Lucy, Countess of Bedford

Those pearls that in your oyster mouth do hide
Have let their sluggish fattening subside;
And since you open not your studded jaws,
Their lacquer slumbers with its sandy cause.

For Lucy, you whose melody would shake
Your pheasant breast, and all your vigor take,
No longer do you arch your uttering throat,
No longer tremble with your gorgeous note.

Such chivalry upon your oval teeth
We would bestow, as forms a gallant wreath,
And scatter honors variously long
Could you resume your quick and furious song.

Now on the green table where you lie,
A noble prisoner of the fearful sky,
Lucy, you survive the general storm,
No tremors in your quiet form.

To Esther, Marchioness of Arlington

Since you deserved fair Arlington's estate
And all the honors of his marquisate,
You float intact upon the peacock lawns.
Peacock! Peacock! Do you sleep with bronze?

Remembering the bloody night of words,
The black marauding forest and your brilliant birds,
You sang; your anguish turned to shame.
How could you celebrate a brutish flame?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

So now with Arlington awhile you try;
Let him contest your cloudy thigh.
Let the trees clatter and clattering the birds.
The colored gardens fill with peacock herds.

From his cool bronze and from his quenching fire
Less torment flows than burst with our desire.
Esther, keep this spacious altitude,
Since peacock you could find no different food.

To Eliza, Duchess of Dorset

In the negro gardens negro birds
Plummet in the shadows, falling thirds.
Dorset in sable plumage comes.
A hawk! A raven in his tediums.

Daughter to that good Earl, once President
Of England's Council, and her Parliament,
Duchess, if that falling shadow strikes
And strikes no more, as Dorset softly likes,

And in your heart the spike its purple draws,
And on your coral neck the marble claws—
O Duchess feel the negro soil beneath
Your crushed mouth and your splintered teeth.

Eliza strangling on the lawn at Knole,
The flowers sinking toward the twilit Pole,
And walking, calling, Dorset now distends;
Dorset cock and cockatoo; and raven ends.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Narrows

For lust is difficult:
The narrows of the brain.
And straightway is its quick result.

Across the frozen plain
The quivering crevasse
Had cut its crimson stain

And straightly you did pass.
Upon the brilliant slope
You knelt, your body glass.

Now tilted on that scope
Of whirling ground you kiss
The paramount feet; you grope

For the unmoved rock you miss.
Bow down among the cult
Who seek that roughhewn bliss

For lust is difficult:
The narrows of the brain.
And straightway is its cold result.

Quick and straightly is its reign.

—JOSEPH D. BENNETT

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Letter from Paris

ROBERT DE SAINT JEAN

IT IS INTERESTING TO OBSERVE that in spite of the anxiety the French have suffered, due to political events both internal and external, their interest in things of the mind has never flagged—quite the contrary. What is taking place in France *préoccupée* of 1948 is just what happened in France *occupée* of 1941. Literature and the arts can be means of banishing reality.

This winter, for several reasons, the theatre has reigned at Paris. To begin with, very few novels of talent have been published recently, and those chosen by the juries (Prix Goncourt and others) are below the mark. The only work to cause some slight stir recently is a biography, *Jeanne d'Arc* by Lucien Fabre. Apart from this, the crisis suffered by the book shops continues to be very serious. Those who, two years ago, bought many old editions, collect no more books, or almost none, for lack of money; and the Christmas holidays, usually so advantageous to the booksellers, were very dull. However, money is always found for the theatre, and people flock there.

One play only, because of its literary quality, took a high place—*Le Maître de Santiago* by Henry de Montherlant. In a background of 16th Century Spain, the author has painted a vivid picture of a father, who is, at the same time, saint and monster. Don Alvaro is a saint in his unselfishness, in his love of truth, in his virtue—and a monster in that equally remarkable pride which, unguessed by him, is so much a part of his being. The dramatic action is tenuous and revolves solely around the marriage of the daughter of this monster-mystic, a marriage which he succeeds in preventing. But from the beginning to the end, the audience remains spellbound, fearful of losing the slightest word of the dialogue, so admirably sustained. The profound theme of the work is the refusal by a unique individual to acknowledge an epoch. It is a theme which reacts strongly on the public, because the men of today are not proud of their epoch, either. Don Alvaro mercilessly castigates Spain of the 16th Century, which in many respects resembles Europe of the 20th. An excessive love of money is vehemently condemned. At one point in the play Don Alvaro's daughter is asked what she would do if she were to become

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rich, and she replies that she would beg God to help her to support so severe a trial. This answer always causes a large part of the audience to break into laughter, which proves that members of the black market are still pretty numerous in Paris.

Montherlant was the first author to be played, after the liberation, from among those who, rightly or wrongly, had been criticized for their attitude during the occupation. Giono was another, and a play of his called *Le Voyage en Calèche* was produced, but it was poor and had no success. In spite of the hostile attitude of some of the critics towards Montherlant, the reviews were favorable and justly so, because the play was good. All this proves that there is still plenty of liberty of thought in France, in spite of heated partisanship. Sacha Guitry was another author severely judged by many, although nothing could be proved against him. His comedy *Le Diable Boiteux* was very badly received by the press, because, in that theatrical fantasy, Guitry, thinly veiled as Prince de Talleyrand, spoke only of Sacha Guitry. Nevertheless, the play drew large audiences, especially young people, who had heard Sacha spoken of, and wished to see for themselves this phenomenon of a celebrated old actor who could always attract a crowd. In *Le Diable Boiteux* the author appears with a new actress, who is, or will be, his fifth wife. For even if Guitry has been writing the same play for ten years, he never fails to change wives.

Two other very well-known writers, both Catholics, have been played this winter. Paul Claudel has given a modified version of the famous *Annonce Faite à Marie*. Some months ago, François Mauriac (whose novel *La Pharisienne* has had, it seems, a certain success in English) produced *Passage du Malin*.

This dramatic comedy, like Mauriac's other plays, is intended to portray the struggle between the flesh and the spirit. But this play rang false in the ears of the public, already badly disposed towards a novelist who had become a writer of political sermons. In his editorials in the *Figaro*, Mauriac is quite capable, in a hundred lines, of talking in one breath of the atom bomb, of eternal salvation, of the awakening of spring, of Stalin, of a sunset, of the angels, of the price of beef-steak, of the beauty of Apollo, of the Pope, of his old grandmother . . . etc. These amazing mixtures, written in a serious and glowing style, annoy many readers, and they are equally exasperated by the poisoned arrows which this Christian writer so skilfullly plants in the bosom of his adversaries. When it became obvious that the *Passage du Malin* was not a success, the audience, on the opening night, was a sight horrible to behold: they stamped their feet with poorly concealed joy. During the intermission, they put on a real scalp dance. Scourged by the critics, the author defended himself—*comme un beau diable*. A few days later, he produced one of those edifying cocktails already described, in which he reproached the men of today for being interested only in their own petty personal affairs when the end of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the world may be upon us at any moment. Later in his article, he spoke of the unjustifiable failure of his play.

Jean-Paul Sartre, who has produced a new play, *Les Mains Sales,* never fails to arouse the curiosity of the public, and he takes full advantage of their interest to display every facet of his talent. This winter, he has published two books of criticism, produced a mediocre film called *Les Jeux Sont Faits,* and has even gone so far as to found a political party.

A Camus play, *La Peste,* will be produced in a few months by J.-L. Barrault's company. Jean-Louis Barrault, best known in America for his film *Les Enfants du Paradis,* is an actor-director who exercises an enormous power over the public. Jouvet has the same gift. Both of them have great force of personality, but that is not the only reason the crowd follows them, for they possess real talent. This winter, they put on Molière, with settings and costumes by Christian Bérard. These were undoubtedly handsome, but the exaggerated importance given to them, and to the scenery as well, forced the critics to decide that a simpler presentation is more fitting to the text. The Comédie Française seized the opportunity to revive the *Andromaque* of Racine with the shabby settings and the traditional costumes. It was a brilliant success, due to an actress, Annie Ducaux, who may be compared to the great tragediennes of the past.

There has been this winter no exhibition of paintings to bring all Paris to its doors, with the exception of the masterpieces from Vienna. Matisse brought out a book, *Jazz,* illustrated in color, with reproductions of his famous *découpages* (tones of bright color cut in paper, according to original patterns.) I saw the painter at Vence, in the Midi, and although he was not well, he worked every day. Picasso, who is also in the Midi, is not painting just now, as he gives up his time to ceramics.

The musical event of the season was the performance of Olivier Messiaen's *Trois Talas Hindous.* He is undoubtedly the most original composer we have at present. He continues to work on his studies of Hindu rhythm—and he has recalled how, for long stretches, he used to lie in the meadows, studying the notes of the birds. Koussevitsky has asked him to write a symphony; it is only half-finished, but he hopes to complete it this summer. It will take one hour and a half to play.

If among the writers there has been no real sensation, there is one author, already well-known, who has seen his prestige grow—André Malraux. When he published this winter *Le Musée Imaginaire* (Vol. I of his *Psychologie de l'Art*) he regained a real ascendancy over many of the young writers. A few weeks after the book appeared, he gave a lecture at the Salle Pleyel on the state of culture of the present day. He insisted on the necessity, now more urgent than ever, for France to defend liberty of thought, for if our country

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

should ever be won over to the one-party system and to controlled thought, she would play a role far-removed from her real self, a role already monopolized by other nations. During this lecture, while ideas succeeded each other at a dizzy pace, the audience made a remarkable tableau. The majority could not follow the orator, but were conscious of a secret pride at finding themselves floating in such a sea of intellectuality! On many faces, one saw the dreadfully smug smile of those who, engrossed, have ceased to exist in their own lives, and have become, at least for some moments, the vessels of new strange thought. . . . All the audience, however, responded visibly to the fervor of the orator, his wan face swept by romantic locks of hair, and the tones of his voice, ranging from sarcasm to prophecy. It was one of the outstanding events of the winter . . . a winter in which Nature (we had the sun almost every day)—but Nature alone, alas—was kind to us.

[*Translated by Celia Tobin Clark*]

A Note on the Theatre

FRANCIS MASON

A NEW REVIVAL of *Macbeth* and a production of *The Alchemist* made their appearance at the end of a season conspicuous for its reliance on old plays; they reinforced several points already suggested by revivals that appeared earlier in the year. The first of these points is an old one: there is no one in New York to direct the classical drama. The second point, partially the result of the first, deserves more comment: there is no one to act the classical drama. This year talented actors have used Broadway to learn skills they should have acquired in schools and colleges—the only American equivalents to European repertory.

The New York City Theatre Company had acted Jonson's *Volpone* in January; it was to be expected that the lessons learned from its failure should produce a result less deliberately grotesque. With *Volpone,* the director and principal player, Mr. José Ferrer, worked on the theory that maximum movement, however aimless, and maximum noise, however unmotivated, would guarantee hilarity and convince any audience that *Volpone,* a Real Classic, was just as funny as a Marx Brothers movie. In his production of the play,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Ferrer abused the Marx Brothers as well as Jonson's text. For *The Alchemist*, Mr. Ferrer turned the direction over to someone else. The result was equally unfortunate in the opposite sense. The respect with which the new director approached his play produced a pace slow enough to make verse unintelligible and action obscure, so that as a whole, the play amused chiefly on a visual level. The lines that came through evoked the shock of recognition that one might have at an amateur performance when one suddenly notes the articulation of a local football player. Even as he respected Jonson's verse, the director doubted the audience's ability to understand the lines, traced the prologue in disrespectful pantomime, expanded metaphors and interpolated niceties of language. Mr. Ferrer, again in a leading role, reproduced, as he had done in *Volpone*, his characterization of Charley's Aunt. It seems impossible for this actor to conceive of comedy that does not consist mainly of the lifted skirt, the falling sock and the Bronx Cheer.

The revival of *Macbeth* directed by Mr. Norris Houghton was more successful. As Macbeth, Michael Redgrave lacked contact with the rest of the players, but these players were acting with such disparate objects in view that his performance gave the play its one consistency. Mr. Redgrave held on to the immediate sense of his lines and did not, like Mr. Evans, speak them for the value they might possess as dramatic poetry separable from the character. The performance was remarkable for success on a literal rather than an imaginative level. Mr. Redgrave's voice is the finest in the theatre since Mr. Olivier's. This production of *Macbeth* had played in London for some months and achieved notoriety for its 'American' staging. But six witches at the beginning of the play and a protracted realistic fight at the end were its only innovations. Mr. Houghton, like Mr. McClintic, seems unable to help actors who do not have the resourcefulness of his principals; minor characters are supernumeraries.

Failures in acting this season have extended from a Greek play to plays whose reputation was secured in the last generation. Miss Cornell cannot act Shakespeare, Mr. Ferrer cannot act Ben Jonson or Tchekov, Miss LeGalliene cannot act Ibsen, Mr. Evans cannot act Shaw and Miss Anderson has assisted Mr. Robinson Jeffers' misunderstanding of *Medea*. Alongside Mr. Redgrave, Mr. Godfrey Tearle, in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, and Mr. Herbert Berghof, in the revivals of *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler*, were the only actors to exemplify more than casual contact with their plays. If we are to be grateful for revivals, we must be grateful to the schools and not to the professional theatre until such time as the schools instruct the theatre or the theatre, by repertory, instructs itself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Recent Verse

FREDERICK MORGAN

TO WALK A CROOKED MILE, by *Thomas McGrath.* Swallow Press and William Morrow. $2.00.
FIGURES FOR AN APOCALYPSE, by *Thomas Merton.* New Directions. $2.50.
SHIPS AND OTHER FIGURES, by *William Meredith.* Princeton University Press. $2.00.
THE LOST SON AND OTHER POEMS, by *Theodore Roethke.* Doubleday. $2.50.
POEMS 1922-1947, by *Allen Tate,* Scribner's. $2.50.

OF THESE FIVE POETS, one, Allen Tate, with a writing career of twenty-five years behind him, has to a large extent been successful, in his battle with the angel of poetry, in giving his work scope and dimension; his *Poems 1922-1947* brings together all of his best verse into a book of major importance. The others on my list, younger men, have necessarily accomplished less; but in the work of William Meredith one finds a tenacity to win out in minor engagements that bodes well for the future, and in that of Theodore Roethke there is already a substantial measure of mature achievement.

Thomas McGrath has plenty of scope in the Whitmanesque sense, which is to say that various American place-names roll from his pen with the greatest of ease. He has also a terrible facility: in the glib unreeling of his long, loose, Audenish lines; in the injection of a stereotyped social consciousness; and in the second-hand use of the sensibilities of others (Crane, Auden, Eliot). Mr. McGrath's competence is of the sort that precludes his coming to grips with his material; he does not, I am afraid, catch a glimpse of the angel. I quote at random:

> *Imagine or remember how the road at last led us*
> *Over bridges like prepositions, linking a drawl of islands.*
> *The coast curved away like a question-mark, listening slyly*
> *And shyly whispered the insomniac Atlantic.*

This is double-talk, not poetry, and the lack of coherence is typical of the whole of *To Walk a Crooked Mile.* What is alarming is that these vices are so

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

prevalent, so much 'in the air,' that a writer like Mr. McGrath may become proficient in them with very little effort. If poetry could in our time become a mass-commodity like slick-magazine fiction, this is very probably the form it would take.

When we turn to the work of Thomas Merton, we find a talent clearly far superior to that of Mr. McGrath, a talent that operates characteristically in terms of a brilliant and sometimes violent imagery and that relies somewhat too heavily upon the rhetoric of exhortation and impassioned statement. I do not mean to be indivious or to imply necessarily a lack of progress in the poet by expressing a preference for some of his earlier, less ambitious work. *Figures for an Apocalypse* makes one well aware of all the pitfalls that lie in wait, as Dr. Johnson knew so well, for the writer of devotional poems. Not much quotation is needed to indicate Brother Merton's flair for colorful imagery:

> *Scotus comes out, and shakes his golden locks*
> *And sings like the African sun. . . .*
>
> *No badger working in the russet grass. . . .*

The trouble is that this brilliance remains an occasional matter. It is not integrated poetically, and the attempted integration in terms of incantatory rhetoric, besides being in itself inadequate, frequently betrays the language into an indiscriminate sensationalism. Thus St. Jerome's

> *most learned, mad*
> *And immaculate indignation*
>
> *Sunders with its meteors the darkness of our classic intellection,*
> *Severs our midnight like a streak of flying pullmans . . .*

The imagery, then, despite the sincerity of the poet, tends to operate in a vacuum, to be at its best merely decorative, at its worst arbitrarily sensational and showing a dangerous inclination towards a stereotyped diction in which such words as *gold, iron* and *marble* are used almost automatically in response to particular emotions in the poet, but without any necessary function in the poem. Hence a montony: all of these poems seem interchangeable, as no one is fully realized. Brother Merton's wayward stantzas, his long loping lines, his avoidance of the metrical structure which might discipline him to an awareness of more powerful and subtle uses of language, all aggravate the prevailing tendency. The hortatory rhetoric booms somewhat hollowly; it implies fervor in the poet, but does not generate its own. Brother Merton has given evidence in the past that he is capable of careful observation and precise im-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

agery; it is along this line that he should proceeed, I believe, if he is to develop a style capable of bearing the burdens of his thoughts.

If Brother Merton is overly valorous, William Meredith, in *Ships and Other Figures,* is full of discretion; his poems are modest, understated and frequently successful at their own level of ambition. It is in general Mr. Meredith's practice to build a poem from a single insight which is the outcome of a felt relationship between image and thought. In his best poems the relationship is clearly grasped, and worked out with a good eye for detail and a nice control of the subtleties available to his metric. Thus the sonnet *Transport,* which I quote in full:

Now seven days from land the gulls still wheel
High and astern. Quiet but fierce with hunger
They follow the fantail: so does the violin, steel-
Thin, follow a high voice in desire and anger.

Her slow stern rolling to the sea, the ship
Travels with no bird's blessing, and burns her waste.
Bird and hull describe the rise and dip
Of heavy ocean where there is no trust.

I think I know a new myth and this is it:
The strength having gone out of certain old men,
Formerly terrible, they are changed to gulls
And follow over endless ocean hulls
Of their rejecting states, wishing for them
Catastrophe. But we shall prosper yet.

Mr. Meredith avoids extremes of tension in his imagery, just as he avoids the more passionate forms of statement. It is not disparagement to point out that his poems are small, for by limiting his ambitions he is clearly imposing a salutary discipline on his talent; there is reason to hope that his work will gain in scope and power as the materials of his vision became denser and more complicated. In the meanwhile, there are one or two weaknesses of style which one would recommend the poet to guard against. First of all, the occasional tendency, derived from Auden, to dilute the verse into a merely mannered statement of commonplaces, the imagery, under this formula, losing its integrating power and becoming, as it were, only a gesture in the direction of poetry. Mr. Meredith tends to fall into it when dealing with "important" subject-matter, notably in *Do Not Embrace Your Mind's New Negro Friend.* There is secondly an occasional failure to maintain tone (in the second stanza

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of *Battlewagon* Mr. Meredith suddenly begins sounding like Mr. McGrath), and an uncertain control of modifiers in general: the predilection for the colorless and the colloquial leading at times to inertness, once or twice into real lapses. Finally, there is the tendency to preciosity, most marked in *Wedding Song*, by which the imagery and tone fail to correspond to the underlying stresses of the poem, but go through the motions according to mannerism only. The problem here, which must continue to confront Mr. Meredith as he enlarges his poetic ambition, is to give sufficient tension to his imagery and metric to enable what is a major stress (and therefore easily stereotyped) to take on life and dimension. But Mr. Meredith has made a good start and gives the impression of knowing what he is about.

Mr. Theodore Roethke's *The Lost Son and Other Poems* is a solid achievement by a poet who should now begin to gain recognition. Of the twenty-nine poems, four of them long, only two can be said to be unsuccessful. Mr. Roethke's verse has an admirable directness which is the outcome of a careful stripping-down of language to a point at which the image functions almost as a concrete object. I quote the first poem in the book, *Cuttings*:

Sticks-in-a-drowse droop over sugary loam,
Their intricate stem-fur dries;
But still the delicate slips keep coaxing up water;
The small cells bulge;

One nub of growth
Nudges a sand-crumb loose,
Pokes through a musty sheath
Its pale tendrilous horn.

The fine placing of *nub, nudges and musty* is only one example of the subtlety and accuracy of this poet. Elsewhere, as in *River Incident*, the 'I' of the poem is focussed on sharply in its relation to the hard surrounding world of objects:

And I knew I had been there before
In that cold, granitic slime,
In the dark, in the rolling water.

The clarity and simplicity that are integral to Mr. Roethke's style are justified by the sureness of his touch in the handling of detail and by his control of the rhythms of his phrasing. There is nothing stereotyped or false about these poems, no admixture of pose; but at a time when most poets are content to ape the mannerisms of their elders they are likely to go unnoticed. Granted, this type of verse is of limited scope; the clarity has been achieved at a sacrifice,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the sacrifice which all good imagist poets make. How is the poet to deal with larger and more complicated contexts?

Mr. Roethke gives his anwer in the last four poems of the book, the long poems. These represent an enormous advance over the earlier work, and are remarkable on many counts. For here the basic techniques have been expanded with a success that is almost complete. Mr. Roethke has dramatized his materials by means of dialogue between the 'I' of the poems and answering voices, voices that may be variously identified but that possess in common with the witches in *Macbeth* and the washerwomen in the Anna Livia Plurabelle sequence of *Finnegans Wake* all the tough natural integrity of the animals and vegetation which they celebrate. The handling of the metric is masterly. We find free verse, metred verse rhymed and unrhymed, short-lined 'jingle' stanzas and effective passages of long lines composed each of two or three short sentences. All of this variety is held in excellent order by the framework of meditation and dialogue. The imagery loses none of its sharpness and precision, and takes on, in the accumulations of the contrapuntal scheme, considerable powers of extension and symbolism, all relative to the underlying themes of death, love and estrangement. These poems are too long to be quoted in full, and it would be unjust to quote them in part. I can only suggest that their author is already an important poet.

Mr. Allen Tate has been for years considered one of our leading men of letters; his new book, *Poems 1922-1947*, is a collection of all the verse which he wishes to save. There is little that is new in the book, the great bulk of it having already appeared in *Selected Poems* (1937) and *The Winter Sea* (1944), but it is good to have all of his major verse in a single (and handsome) volume; and the interesting arrangement which Mr. Tate has made of his work, juxtaposing early and late poems, casts a fresh light on the development of his style while indicating certain fundamental preoccupations that have remained constant. Mr. Tate has also included his translation of the *Pervigilium Veneris* (with Latin text *en face*) and a few uncollected pieces, together with some early work that was omitted from the *Selected Poems*.

That Mr. Tate's work forms a durable and permanent contribution to letters there is no need to insist on now. The present volume should establish what one has long felt to be true: that Mr. Tate has done more than add a few very good poems to the language, fine though this achievement is and few enough the poets in any age who succeeded to it; this poetry has attained the stature at which it must inevitably be assessed in its totality, at which even the less successful poems take on importance for the understanding of the whole.

An early and very remarkable poem, *The Cross*, is a good example of Mr. Tate's habitual procedure. It begins:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There is a place that some men know,
I cannot see the whole of it
Nor how I came there. Long ago
Flame burst out of a secret pit . . .

The opening is low-pitched; the first three lines are purposefully abstract and generalized. But when the image comes, it 'bursts,' and with an almost flame-like effect.

Crushing the world with such a light
The day-sky fell to moonless black,
The kingly sun to hateful night
For those, once seeing, turning back:

This is vivid and powerful imagery, but observe that it functions within a mode of apprehension that is highly abstract; it is as if reason itself had flared into unique and particularized existence. Four more lines of abstraction, beautifully phrased:

For love so hates mortality
Which is the providence of life
She will not let it blesséd be
But curses it with mortal strife

and the poem moves on, through another violent image, of "young wolves that have tasted blood," to its splendid conclusion:

The last alternatives they face
Of life, without the life to save,
Being from all salvation weaned—
A stag charged both at heel and head:
Who would come back is turned a fiend
Instructed by the fiery dead.

The imagery, then, is held in constant tension with what might be called the abstract framework of the poem, and is, in a sense, subservient to it. Such a formulation has, of course, a limited value—that of indicating the nature of the imagery employed. It should not be taken to mean that what is 'abstract' in the poem is not poetry or not as good poetry or even that it is devoid of imagery. What should be clear is that the imagery of *The Cross* is of a sort diametrically opposed to that of Ezra Pound or William Carlos Williams, or of a lesser poet like Theodore Roethke. For, in Mr. Tate's work, it is not the image that is sharpened, but the insight that is the result of image interacting with thought.

But if this be held sufficient grounds for labeling Tate an 'intellectual'

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

poet, one should beware. In these poems the image hardly ever retreats (as it does so often in Auden, for example) to the politeness of mere illustration. One has only to examine the image of the stag in *The Cross;* the only preparation for it is the preceding image of the "wolves that have tasted blood"; but to call it 'illustrative' would be nonsense; it is brilliantly justified in terms of the stress of the poem. Tate is an 'intellectual' poet if one means by that that he is conscious and disciplined, and that his sensibility operates largely in terms of the abstract; but he is not 'intellectual' in the sense of diluting his poetry to a preconceived abstract framework. In fact, his weaknesses are precisely the opposite: they stem from an occasional overindulgence in image-making that is reminiscent of the Romantics. (I must agree with Mr. Yvor Winters in his condemnation of the jaguar image in the *Ode to the Confederate Dead*: the violence here is extrinsic to the poem, and is largely a matter of the poet's own emotion.) But on the whole Tate is 'intellectual' precisely as Alexander Pope is intellectual; Pope has suffered great injustices from the over-facile application of this label, and he is, of all the great poets of our tradition, and far more than the metaphysicals, the one whom Tate most resembles (I am not suggesting that Tate's achievement is necessarily commensurate with Pope's); if our times had made available to the poet a working tradition comparable to that of the Augustans, the resemblance would be so much the more marked.

The much-criticized 'difficulty' of Tate's work should now come into clearer perspective. These poems are not difficult in the way that poems by Pound, or Eliot, or Hart Crane are difficult. There is no need for exegesis (assuming that one is tolerably well educated), nothing genuinely abstruse, no basic emotional incoherence. But it is becoming harder and harder for Americans to reason logically and at the same time to keep their reasonings close to the experiences of daily life. With us, perfection of the mind is tragically separated from perfection of life. The concept of a traditional society is now no more than a concept, a dream for dreamers, and not a need felt in the bloodstream, as it is in Tate's poems. Without a sense of tradition it is as impossible for Americans to understand America as it is for them to understand all of the past, which is our inheritance. Tate has been called a fascist for his insistence on the values of tradition and order; but at a time when his countrymen subscribe either to a featureless materialism or to false mystiques, he is perhaps the most crucially 'American' of all our poets, for he gives poetic form to what is peculiarly our own predicament (Eliot is more 'universal'); for that very reason it is the tendency to find him unpalatable. He writes in the 'unpleasant' tradition of Hawthorne, Melville and James.

What these poems are built of, then, is a sense of Original Sin, grasped in all of its unpleasantness with an uncompromising honesty. Tate is a good

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

antidote in a time when sin is creeping home through the back door, by way of Kafka and Auden, half-recognized, but with the emphasis on the pathos of the suffering individual, and leaving plenty of room for the well-intentioned meliorism of social reformers. If there is Original Sin, it is in the blood (and see what Tate does with blood imagery); it too is our inheritance.

These poems, then, dramatize fallen man in a divided society; the measure of their success is that they make the reader participate in the general predicament and know it for himself. It is nonsense, therefore, to maintain (as some critics have so confidently) that Tate's poems lack scope. They lack facility and variety of approach, but the scope is there; properly read, the poems are crucial to an understanding of the times, and to an understanding of poetry.

Not that they are invariably successful: for where most of the early shorter poems such as *The Cross, Idiot,* and *Last Days of Alice* hold up very well on rereading, the same cannot be said of longer meditative-didactic pieces like *To the Lacedemonians, Retroduction to American History* and *Causerie.* Despite brilliant moments, these survive largely as commentary. At a higher level, the *Ode to the Confederate Dead* seems now to be at least a partial failure in that the dramatization of the theme never finds its final form. Tate's finest work is in two poems, *Seasons of the Soul* and *Winter Mask,* which were first published in *The Winter Sea.* They are thus late work; they have the mastery that is the outcome of time as well as talent; they have the clarity and purity that are the outcome of an impetus towards salvation that is achieved, momentarily but finally, in poetic terms. I should like, in closing, to give concrete evidence of this mastery by quoting two stanzas from the latter poem. The first should indicate how much can be done with images, clearly and precisely stated, when they are involved with the stress of thought and emotion under the control of the governing sensibility:

The poisoned rat in the wall
Cuts through the wall like a knife,
Then blind, drying, and small
And driven to cold water,
Dies of the water of life:
Both damned in eternal ice,
The traitor become the boor
Who had led his friend to slaughter,
Now bites his head—not nice,
The food that he lives for.

The second should show how much 'abstraction' can be absorbed by a fine poem when its structure of thought and imagery is adequate:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I asked the master Yeats
Whose great style could not tell
Why it is man hates
His own salvatiòn,
Prefers the way to hell,

And finds his last safety
In the self-made curse that bore
Him towards damnatiòn:
The drowned undrowned by the sea,
The sea worth living for.

Tate is one of the four or five best American poets of the century, and at his best he is, with Hart Crane, although for entirely different reasons, the most powerful.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Making of Poetry

W. B. C. WATKINS

POETS AT WORK, essays by *W. H. Auden, Karl Shapiro, Rudolph Arnheim, Donald A. Stauffer.* Introduction by Charles D. Abbott. Harcourt, Brace. $2.75.

IN THESE UNEVEN BUT EXTREMELY INTERESTING ESSAYS four experts—two poets, a psychologist, a teacher and critic of literature—investigate the unique collection of contemporary poets' worksheets assembled at the Lockwood Memorial Library of the University of Buffalo by the quiet tenacity of Mr. Charles Abbott, whose experiences with poets and their legatees anticipate some of the problems later dealt with by the four essayists. Both Auden and Arnheim observe that this concern with the poet's mind in labor is distinctly a phenomenon of this century. Is it an invasion of creative privacy? Some who hesitated to surrender worksheets thought so; others cooperated enthusiastically. Is diverting attention from the finished work of art to the psychological process of its making a new genetic fallacy?

I suspect that Auden, who is here uncomfortable as well as incorrigible, sometimes brilliant, sometimes trivial, would give an equivocal yes to these questions, if he did not simply evade them. One wonders why, knowing in advance the nature of the venture, he agreed to cooperate. He has the English obsession with privacy (more would unquestionably profit us). He shares with several of his generation in England, that mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease, fear of being caught serious and a youthful virtuosity never quite outgrown. To him, Isherwood, Evelyn Waugh (not MacNeice and Spender, but also Huxley) still cling traces of the precociously brilliant undergraduate.

At times in his essay Auden is a petulant Browning scoring off the importunate ladies of the Browning Societies. At others he is the kind of European lecturer who is content to jot hasty notes on the commuter's train to his lecture platform: what matter if much paste adulterate the pearls? The glib witticism about the Greeks, for example, he might have got off—and probably did—his second year at Oxford. But he is too gifted to defeat, he only disappoints expectation. Insistence on pleasure in the gratuitous is a needed corrective to over-seriousness. Many good poets probably write for the sheer fun of it; others pretend to. Here and there among the clownings are some perceptive observations on his own experience and the craft which he knows as few living poets do.

If Auden evades responsibility, Shapiro and Stauffer welcome it. Stauffer's is the most comprehensive view, based on an intelligent and clear critical position, generously illustrated with analyses. After a slow, thoughtful medita-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion, Shapiro suddenly comes to grips in an original and admirably unassuming way with two poems of Spender, one of William Carlos Williams, and the problem of Hart Crane. At his best he is the best of the four. His method of analysis is less pyrotechnic, more tentative and personal than Stauffer's, which might conceivably have been used (in a somewhat more doctrinaire way) by Cleanth Brooks. Not being a psychologist, I can say of Arnheim only that he sets the collection in historical and psychological perspective, suggesting avenues for future exploration. One misses in his essay direct application to the poems themselves, until he comes to abstract, concrete, and specific; then he makes provocative points from a fresh point of view, illuminating briefly Huxley and Spender.

The high points of the volume are Shapiro's study of Spender, his circling and re-circling of Williams' poem (a fascinating process, leaving me ultimately in the air), and Stauffer's analysis of Blackmur's *Missa Vocis,* so brilliant that it almost becomes bravura and seems faintly to embarrass the author. Especially in the first and tightly-knit half of his essay Stauffer draws on an unusually fine knowledge of poetry, and by allusiveness weaves a richer texture than any of the others, though his prose ends by floating too many quotations. Aware that Blackmur (*Missa Vocis,* incidentally, makes the Housman poem compared to it seem attenuated and quaint) is the kind of poet who lends himself perfectly to intellectual analysis, and too practised to fall into easy snares, Stauffer wisely avoids generalizing the poetic process, offering a gallery of poets at work in quite different ways. We see MacNeice changing only a few words, Miss Taggard diving down many blind alleys before finding the opening. The desire to be catholic and perfectly honest leads Stauffer to treat too many worksheets, several not suitable to his particular method.

Is, as he says, the 'progress of an artist in creation *always* toward greater purity, intensity, and unity'? Shapiro agrees; he has never seen a discarded poem that excelled the final form. Whole texts have been built by scholars on this assumption, which seems to grant the poet creative perfection. Many paintings demonstrably suffer from being too much fussed over. Surely somewhere a good but erring poet has not left well enough alone once.

According to Stauffer, the artist ought to be his own best critic, since he knows what he is striving for. All the first rate critics of English literature have been practising writers; but they are not equally trustworthy as self-critics. Thinking—say, of Wordsworth's and Tennyson's comments on their own poetry, I should italicize the 'ought.' Dryden and Keats and, in rare instances, Arnold are reliable. And has not Eliot's famous 'objective correlative' become, through no fault of his, as shopworn as 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'? In each case the phrase illuminates the particular poet's method of creation without being entirely happy as a generalization. Yeats' 'system'

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in that biography of his mind, *A Vision,* fascinates but repels me as gimcrackery of esoteric flotsam, and Blake's neo-philosophy is frightening in implications; yet the relevance to the poetry is undeniable, and I admire almost extravagantly the poetic transmutation. The pre-expressive stage is the province of the esthetic philosopher (Croce); the critic's concern is with the finished product.

Yet Shapiro and Stauffer are concerned with what Eliot means when he calls the criticism of the artist himself *during creation* the most important criticism of all, and this these studies, particularly these two, amply demonstrate, whether or not they unveil the arcanum of creation. Certainly the worksheets flood with new light the technique and meaning of poetry itself. Hitherto we have had few (Keats', which have been of immense value; Wordsworth's revisions, of more biographic than poetic interest). Privacy is of course a personal matter. But who would forego, now that they are common property, the Malahide papers? We are in debt to all the poets who generously contributed, and it is poetic justice that Spender, the most generous, happens to receive such extended and rewarding treatment.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tradition and the Academic Talent

H. M. McLUHAN

ELIZABETHAN AND METAPHYSICAL IMAGERY, by *Rosemond Tuve.* University of Chicago Press. $6.00.

THE HIGHER STUDY OF NATIONAL LITERATURES which got underway about 1870 was begun with an eye on the dominant science of physiology. All criteria of literary "influences," "sources," and *genres* tended to be referred to the modes of explanation fashionable in physiology. To this day, these initial assumptions largely control the activities of literary research. Literary appreciation, on the other hand, was handed over to aesthetics, and the latter was and is mainly Kantian in its assumptions of categorical ordering of the opaque world of sensibles, represented alike by things and by prose and poetry. Evaluation and taste were, in this Kantian view, necessarily subjective in the sense that the mind conferred intelligibility on things by referring them to appropriate categories. Taste became starved because it was a matter of mere recognition of forms.

Poetry of the "symbolist" wing proceeded on radically different assumptions about things, about language, about poems, and about the mind. Intelligibility was not for the symbolists conferred on things but derived from them. The mind was nourished by things and taste was nurtured by poems. The ancient idea of "signatures of all things I am here to read" coupled with the notion of correspondencies was a reversal of the prevalent doctrine of the sensible world as opaque, or as impenetrably monadic.

Contemporary criticism has mainly come into existence as the effort to maintain contact with symbolist and later developments in poetry. It has not, therefore, tended to be doctrinaire, nor have its practitioners been especially conscious of the philosophical bearings of their new kind of interest in language. For example, the theoretical part of the work of I. A. Richards was an attempt to elucidate the new critical activity in terms of the Kantian notions of imagination, feeling, and concept. But since this psychological doctrine could never come to close grips with things or poems, it has finally proved to have very little relevance to the new poetry or to the new criticism.

Literary criticism is not an autonomous activity, any more than is literary

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

scholarship. But criticism naturally tends to exercise control over scholarship as much as poetry determines the interests of the critic. Miss Tuve's book is, therefore, of primary interest in illustrating the fruitfulness of scholarship which is in touch with the contemporary activities of poets and critics. More especially her work has grown out of the sharp focus of attention which recent poets and critics have produced in the area of Elizabethan drama and metaphysical poetry. Perhaps for the first time since the higher study of literature began in the universities of the nineteenth century, "pure scholarship" has begun to engage itself with a central problem of contemporary awareness. In fact, there would seem to be some real hope for the view that in the present study, as in recent studies in other subjects, the basis for a new intellectual and cultural unity has been prepared in late years.

The somewhat aggressive tone which Miss Tuve adopts towards contemporary critics for their failure to see the metaphysicals as they saw themselves will be matched by the rejoinders of the critics. But the critics would do well to make a scholarly effort proportioned at least to that which Miss Tuve has made to appropriate the methods of the critics. Encyclopedic erudition is as necessary to the critic as to the poet. But it is an encyclopedism vitalized by a sense of contemporary relevance which is always needed. And this, finally, can only be the fruit of a living cultural unity.

Traditional *grammatica, dialectica,* and *rhetorica* as they were shared and utilized by the Elizabethan and Jacobean poets are the themes of Miss Tuve's book. How are these trivial disciplines, themselves inseparable from an ancient trunk of metaphysical speculation and moral wisdom, to be given any contemporary relevance? Miss Tuve's reply is partly that of the scholar. Namely, that for the due understanding of the largest part of European and English literature from Dante to Dr. Johnson (the vigor of the trivium was felt throughout that period), detailed practical knowledge of traditional poetic, dialectic and rhetoric is indispensable. Her answer is only partially that of the critic. Namely, that for the precise kind of enjoyment of language and imagery which the contemporary critics tend to insist on, this erudition is particularly necessary. Both of her replies have real force. But they don't provide an answer to the problem of relevance.

In fact, the contemporary mind is almost bound to reply, regardless of the evidence, that the "genetic" view of history guarantees that whatever is of the past is, by the same token, exhausted. The present, it is assumed, is the actualization of all of the possibilities of the past. Whatever of value was in the traditional poetic and rhetoric has been taken up into our own culture. The rest is archaeology or reactionary nostalgia.

The reply to this view is implicit in Miss Tuve's repeated claim that traditional poetic and rhetoric provided both for writer and audience all that is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

done today plus a great deal more. Thus, Miss Tuve establishes that for the traditional or Renaissance poet there was no conflict between the claims of delight and didacticism. There is no modern claim for poetry which they would not have understood and endorsed but also none to which they would not have added a great deal which we leave out. The great poet, the great statesman, the great theologian, and the great scientist were in the traditional view one and the same man. Because knowledge was one. The disciplines all reinforced one another and practical experience was as necessary to the encyclopedic ideal of Bacon as to that of Milton.

Again, there could be no separation between thought and feeling any more than between language and poetry. The basic conception of metaphor as the analogy of improper proportionality was rooted in the metaphysical analogy of being. The poet was to the world he made as God to creation.

The traditional conception of decorum, of genres and of the levels of style, was what we would call both organic and functional. It was a matter of the utmost subtlety of perception to adjust these things, as of aesthetic pleasure to recognize them, until subsequent mathematicism began to reduce decorum to external categories in the later seventeenth century. Decorum was inseparable from psychology and from the ethical doctrine of the mean, and also from politics, so that Wordsworth's discarding of the doctrine in the name of natural man has in it a kind of decorum of its own.

What it amounts to is this. That if the Renaissance poetic is to be for us anything more than an academic game of spotting figures we must recover the entire philosophy which vitalized that poetic. Miss Tuve, as a historical scholar, is not obliged to face this issue. For the critic, however, it is the main concern. The critic would like to see the scholar trace the precise causes by which an entire tradition which was so flourishing in 1620 should by 1820 have left scarce a rack behind. And in this connection it is useful to point to one of the principal deficiencies of Miss Tuve's scholarship. It concerns Petrus Ramus. Ramus in following Ockhamist nominalism developed a dialectical and rhetorical theory which had crucial theological implications. It was the theological issue which gave his rhetoric the salience then which eludes us now. By means of his rhetoric the numerous tropes of Scripture were handled in a summary and rationalistic spirit. The doctrine of transubstantiation was necessarily the crux. For the Ramist theologian the metaphors and similes of the New Testament were only *elocutio*. The doctrine lay not in, but under the figures.

In supposing, therefore, that we owe the greater intensity and closeness of texture of Jacobean poetry to Ramus, Miss Tuve proceeds from an unstudied problem to a conclusion which might have followed from something much more obvious. From Erasmus to Browne there is a mounting wave of patristic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

study and of careful imitation of the styles of the Fathers, the crest of which forms in John Donne, known to his contemporaries as "our English Tertullian." It was, according to Bacon, the study of the Fathers (distasteful to the Ramists) that brought on the abundance of speech which Bacon deplored and in which we delight.

On the other hand a deficiency of critical perception attends Miss Tuve's claim that between the Elizabethan and metaphysical poets there is no difference such as would warrant our own decisive preference for the latter. It is true that the same figures are used by both. But the ears of the metaphysicals were charged with the rhythms of the later Elizabethan drama, and it is that dramatic energy which is absent, for example, from Spenser and Daniel. The vitality of an entire society is in those rhythms.

But to say that Miss Tuve has not done everything is after all to point to the great deal she has done. There is one contemporary figure from whom she might have derived a great deal of illustration for her discussion. James Joyce not only knew Renaissance poetic and rhetoric in detail but there is scarcely a figure in traditional rhetoric or any nuance of the doctrine of decorum which is not integral to the organization of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Had Miss Tuve had this two-handed weapon to use it is to be feared that the critics would have come off less gracefully than they do. It is with Joyce that the critic must begin to discover the relevance, if any, of Renaissance poetic.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Apostolic Fathers

JOHN RAWLS

THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH: THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS, translated by *Francis X. Glimm, Joseph M.-F. Marique; S.J.*, and *Gerald G. Walsh, S.J.* Cima Publishing Company.

THIS VOLUME REPRESENTS THE FIRST of a series of seventy-two volumes containing the works of the Christian theologians of the Ante- and Post-Nicene periods. The series is under the editorship of Ludwig Schopp and parallels a similar program under the guidance of Father Quasten.

The translators have done a commendable job of putting what is often unpolished Greek into English, and while one can find points to dispute with their rendering, it is on the whole scrupulous. The translation carries through the spirit and meaning of the original with reasonable accuracy, and while Protestants might protest, for example, against an occasional tendency to avoid translating δίκαιος and δικαιοσύνη as 'righteous' and 'righteousness', one must remember that a translation in works of this kind is bound to reflect, to some degree, the theology of the translator.

The volume includes all the works which have been traditionally collected under the heading of the 'Apostolic Fathers': The Epistle of St. Clement to the Corinthians, the so-called Second Letter to the Corinthians, the Letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch, the Letter of St. Polycarp to the Philippians, the Martyrdom of St. Polycarp, the Didache, the Letter of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Letter to Diognetus and the Fragments of Papias. Each text is prefaced by a historical and critical introduction which provides enough information to understand the context of the work in the history of the church. These short introductions are unbiased on controversial issues. For example, Catholic scholars are prone to see in the Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians an actual proof of their belief that even at that early date (approximately 96 A.D.) the bishop at Rome was considered the head of the universal church. While Father Glimm hastens to point out that "In this letter the Roman Church is seen as holding an impressive position of authority" and that "The ancient history of the Church shows no similar letter of rebuke and reproval sent by one Christian community to another, and we judge that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

none would have been received except from Rome," he does not go beyond the evidence, except perhaps in the last clause. Certainly the absence in what has come down to us of such letters is very little proof that there were none, and in later centuries such figures as Cyprian and Augustine exercise independent authority for all practical purposes. And there were other churches besides Rome which were regarded as the 'Mother Church' by small communities in other parts of the Empire. But on the whole, the historical introductions are accurate.

One does not find among the Apostolic Fathers any sustained piece of theological reasoning, but one does find among these writings all the various types of Christian literature. There is the Epistle of Clement written, like the letters of Paul, to meet a specific crisis. There is the so-called Second Epistle, which is not an epistle at all, but a homily by an unknown author representing one of the earliest examples of Christian preaching. In the letters of Ignatius one finds fully documented the thoughts and feelings of a saint on the way to martyrdom at Rome. The Didache represents the codification of Christian teachings, probably for use in the instruction of converts, and in the letter to Diognetus there is contained perhaps the earliest example of Christian apologetics, the attempt to make Christianity reasonable to the ruling class of the Empire. The Shepherd of Hermas displays the type of apocalyptic writing so common in its day, while the Letter of Barnabas is instructive in showing the manner in which some Christian thinkers attempted to interpret the Scriptures allegorically. These writings are important in reflecting the forces at work in the period of the Church's internal consolidation against the world of the Empire. They show how Christians understood their station and their future.

At present, this volume is accessible only in the large libraries. It is hoped that larger numbers will be printed and that they will be available for private purchase. The Apostolic Fathers, overlooked in present-day liberal education, should be restored to common knowledge as significant elements in the tradition of the West.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Recent Fiction

JOSEPH FRANK

THE GESTURE, by *John Cobb*. Harper & Bros. $2.75.
THE PATCHWORK TIME, by *Robert Gibbons*. Alfred A. Knopf. $3.00.
THE IDES OF MARCH, by *Thornton Wilder*. Harper & Bros. $2.75.
DEMIAN, by *Hermann Hesse*. Henry Holt & Co. $3.00.
THE CIRCUS IN THE ATTIC, by *Robert Penn Warren*. Harcourt, Brace. $3.00.
A LONG FOURTH AND OTHER STORIES, by *Peter Taylor*. Harcourt, Brace. $3.00.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR has not, thus far, produced anything in this country comparable to the post-war literature of the Twenties, nor is it likely to do so. There is, for one thing, no necessary reason why the writers of successive generations should be equally gifted; but even if they were, the reaction of a new generation to the same basic experience, such as a war, is bound to be different if only because it has assimilated the experience of the older generation by reading their books. The first World War, to borrow a phrase from Van Wyck Brooks, was in a sense America's coming of age; the most important books produced by that conflict, such as those of Hemingway, Dos Passos and Faulkner, were filled with the sense of disillusionment caused by the contrast between the supposed objectives of the war and the senseless brutality of the fighting. The famous passage from *A Farewell to Arms*, in which the protagonist suddenly finds that words like "honor" and "glory" have lost all meaning for him, is the symbol for this general state of mind.

The generation that fought the Second World War (it is understood, of course, that we are talking about the cultural élite who read literature and produce it) grew up in this atmosphere of what we might call emotional nominalism: the rejection of so-called universal moral slogans. This fact was clearly seen by a literary politician like Archibald MacLeish, who, when the country was getting set for the second conflict, was afraid that this skeptical attitude might dampen the ardor for combat and wrote his jeremiad, *The Irresponsibles*, to counteract it. In any event, so far as one can judge, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dominant feeling toward the recent war was that it was a dirty, unpleasant but necessary job, to be done as quickly as possible, and to be borne with whatever patience and good humor could be mustered under the circumstances; there was none of the wide-eyed idealism that made the first conflict the occasion for an almost complete transvaluation of values. It is no accident that the most popular book written about the second World War, *Mr. Roberts*, is light comedy, and that the hero has those qualities of patient understanding and good humor required to meet the demands of the situation.

These reflections were induced by a reading of John Cobb's *The Gesture*, a book which is far from being important in itself, but which has a central theme of symptomatic significance that the author is unable to master. The heart of the book is the conflict between an idealistic commanding officer, who takes the slogans of the second World War seriously, and the men of his American bomber squadron, who, because of his humorless sense of dedication to a high purpose, look on him as an unconscionable prig. The climax of the novel comes when the officer, Major Gregory Harris, precipitates a race riot by billeting colored troops in the same quarters as whites. Facing censure by his superior officers, he flies a dangerous special mission himself and is killed. This theme seems to symbolize the general shift in attitude in the present generation: the character who takes the slogans of the war at their face value is now the outcast, rather than, as in the first World War books, the one who could no longer believe in them.

Unfortunately, as we have already remarked, Mr. Cobb makes very little of the possible ramifications of his major theme. His failure may best be seen in his conception of the central figure, the supposed idealist, Major Harris. The symbolic stature of this character is completely undermined because Mr. Cobb pictures him as lacking in any tact, sensibility or human understanding. His conflict with his fellow-officers arises because he behaves like a petty tyrant: he enforces useless rules about saluting, plays Beethoven in the officers' club to the acute annoyance of others present, and otherwise behaves like a boorish fool; this superficial level of conflict hides the deeper and far more important one we have tried to indicate. Regardless of what Major Harris believed about the war, these actions would have been bound to irritate those around him; they have, in short, no necessary and organic relation to the conflict of attitude and belief that, if successfully conveyed, would have lifted the incidents of the novel above those of an interesting anecdote. Mr. Cobb has a few lame speeches by Major Harris in which he holds forth on the "responsibility" of the intellectual, in a war for the ideals of Western civilization, to embody these ideals in every phase of his life; these are presumably supposed to function as the tie-in between the two levels of conflict by motivating the Major's actions; but they are so perfunctory and school-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

boyish that they serve only to make the deficiencies of the book more glaring.

What it comes down to is that Mr. Cobb is unable to project adequate symbols for the important issue he has dimly felt but is not talented enough to objectify. To give us this conflict in a successful work of art would no doubt take a writer of Hemingway's stature; and Mr. Cobb, despite his somewhat limp imitation of the wry understatement of Hemingway's manner, shows no sign of being able to develop anywhere near this rank.

If Mr. Cobb's novel is an instance of a major theme whose possibilities remain abortive, Robert Gibbons' book, *The Patchwork Time*, stands at the opposite pole: it is an instance of a theme which, taken by itself, does not proliferate symbolic meanings, but which is overlaid with an elaborate structure of implied symbolic reference consciously contrived by the author and worked out with considerable perseverance. The pattern of the novel is the now-classic one of the *Entwicklungsroman*, the development of a main character from youth to maturity; as such, it has been used by some of the greatest masters of the novel form, from Goethe to Joyce, and is capable of practically infinite extension; but the richness of the pattern, the range of meanings that it develops, depends on the inherent potentialities of the main character and the emotional and spiritual complexity of the world with which he interacts.

Mr. Gibbons' hero is a quite ordinary young man named Johnny Somers, whose chief claim to attention, apparently, is that he has reached the age of twenty-one and is still an unwilling virgin. The world he interacts with is a small Southern town, where he comes to teach high school and to be seduced by an amiable and good-hearted trollop, Blackie Boone, who senses his fear and loneliness. Because he is with Blackie at the time he learns of his father's death, Johnny is assailed with guilt feelings (the motivation here is exceedingly obscure) and suffers a moral crisis, which is finally resolved when his family learns of his affair with Blackie. The relief of no longer hugging his secret alone dissolves it, and the novel ends with Johnny understanding "that to be part of life was to be fallible."

Given this initial paucity of his material, the success of Mr. Gibbons' book hinges on what he can make of Johnny, the amount of dignity and symbolic meaning he can work into Johnny's crisis. His efforts here, however, seem to me stymied by a contradiction between the end he has in view and the means he employs—between his subject and his technique. As an example of Mr. Gibbons' prose, we can take the opening sentences of the book:

> Rain over the countryside was a sad thing, and the long call of the train whistle was a lonely thing. In the grey light of late afternoon the rain and the train's long call were the saddest and the loneliest of things, so that a man needed no great sorrow to feel heavyladen of heart. He needed only a little seed of homecall and time sadness.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What strikes one immediately about this style, which skirts dangerously close to the edge of bathos, is the vagueness and imprecision of its texture: it communicates the hazy effluence of feeling, but does not define the feeling itself in any way. This is the style, not only of the straight narrative portions of the book that revolve around Johnny, but also of the interior monologues and dialogues that Johnny has with himself and with a clumsily contrived internal heckler; and it is not up to handling anything so finely-shaded as an internal crisis of the kind that Johnny is supposed to experience. It is true, of course, that Johnny's own feelings are inchoate and ill-defined; but the whole process of his inner development, to be meaningful in symbolic terms, has to be more than a mere succession of waves of feeling; and Mr. Gibbons is never able to illuminate this development on a level above that of a series of primitive responses. The result is that Johnny Somers, as a character, does not carry the weight placed on him in the book. His crisis, rather than being a mark of some special distinction and sensitivity, simply seems silly and puerile; the whole center of the book becomes hollow and annoyingly pretentious.

But the contradiction we have pointed out does not apply to the minor characters, who are either seen from the outside, or who at least are not endowed with a sensibility that Mr. Gibbons cannot make convincing. His portrait of Lurlene Oakes, the poor-white farm girl who comes to town to work as a waitress, and who, out of a pathetic desire for a few paltry luxuries, gives herself to several men and finally kills herself when she becomes pregnant, is rendered with sympathy and understanding. The same is true of Bill Boone, the ex-high school football star who has never grown up, and whose well-meaning spinelessness and drunken irresponsibility lead to his complete disintegration. These characters, and most of the other people in Pineboro, are solidly, carefully and conscientiously worked out in a manner that commands respect; from his success with these, Mr. Gibbons shows that on the straight naturalistic plane he is a writer of considerable power and persuasion, if not at present of particular originality.

Thornton Wilder's *The Ides of March* is not, as the two previous books were, the first or second production of a relatively young writer; his is the work of a mature and self-conscious (perhaps too self-conscious) craftsman, who has already proven his mastery over a variety of literary forms. Mr. Wilder's novels are usually good reading in a special sense, and one not too common in contemporary American writing: they are always charmingly written, never dull or vulgar or embarrassingly naive; one wishes that the average level of writers had Mr. Wilder's acquaintance with literary tradition, his good taste and his sense of style; but somehow, one leaves his work with the regretful feeling that it is fundamentally a brilliant exercise, and that Mr. Wilder has

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not yet found a subject that would engage him as a whole man, a subject that flows from some profound emotional pressure demanding expression. Lacking this, Mr. Wilder now gives us another highly polished literary pastiche, which allows him to counterfeit a Platonic dialogue, compose satirical *grafitti* supposedly scribbled on the walls of Roman public places, and set down various reflections on life, love and literature in a style which, without being stiff or pedantic, yet manages to suggest the elegant orotundity of Latin prose rhythms.

Mr. Wilder's publishers have been advertising his book by reprinting short excerpts from various sections; and for once, the advertising bears some relation to the book's merits. For its best parts are precisely short snippets here and there in which some insight is condensed into an epigram, or some sardonic interplay of dialogue is imagined whose usually erotic allusions Mr. Wilder discreetly points up with interlarded commentary. But whether these fragments add up to anything as unified as a novel is another question. In some ways, it is unfortunate that the question should arise at all, for literary pastiche is a recognized, if minor, art form in European literature: one thinks of such books as Jules Lemaître's *En marge des vieux livres* or, in Spanish, Azorín's *Al margen de los clásicos*, both of which contain sketches in various forms, just as Mr. Wilder's book does, that attempt to evoke the flavor of great historical personalities and great works of art through imaginative recreation rather than through straightforward analysis. Mr. Wilder's book, which he labels "a fantasia on certain events and persons of the last days of the Roman republic," appears to spring out of this type of impulse and to belong with the above mentioned books, rather than with any historical novel properly so called. The pity is that, since the genre is practically unknown in this country, Mr. Wilder felt obliged to subtitle his book "a novel," and thus subject it to critical standards which are not really relevant.

The unity of the book, from an external point of view, comes from the fact that the documents invented by Mr. Wilder (the book is made up of a series of imagined letters, state papers, entries in private journals, scraps of plays and such like) all date from or deal with the events supposedly occurring during the several months preceding the assassination of Julius Caesar. A clue to the possible internal unity these may have had for Mr. Wilder, if they had any at all, is the epigraph to the book, two lines from the second part of *Faust*:

> Das Schaudern ist der Menschheit bestes Teil;
> Wie auch die Welt ihm das Gefühl verteure . . .

These lines are translated by Mr. Wilder thus: "The shudder of awe is human-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ity's highest faculty. Even though this world is forever altering its values . . ." And as a gloss, Mr. Wilder provides the following: "Out of man's recognition in fear and awe that there is an Unknowable comes all that is best in the explorations of his mind—even though that recognition is often misled into superstitition, enslavement, and overconfidence." An interesting point about this gloss is that it is based on a mistranslation of the second line of the quotation. German commentators of *Faust* agree that this line means something like: "No matter how difficult the world makes it for man to have this feeling . . ." i.e., the shudder of awe. But this error shows what meaning Mr. Wilder *wanted* the line to have, permitting us to infer that this meaning must have had some particular importance for him.

It would probably be possible, after several readings of the book and considerable cogitation, to work out a pattern for all the major characters showing how each is both ennobled and betrayed by his sense of the mystery of existence and his attempts to give that mystery a meaning; the present writer seems to sense such a pattern, but has neither the time, the space, nor the desire to work it out in any detail. Whether it actually exists or not, it is never felt esthetically as an integrating element, and therefore does not provide the book with any internal unity. If Mr. Wilder intended to communicate any such unity, then his work must be pronounced a failure on this level. But on the level of highly civilized literary entertainment it is eminently successful; and once the necessary distinctions have been made between such a book and genuinely creative literature, its not inconsiderable merits should be given the critical recognition they deserve.

A critical problem somewhat similar to that posed by Mr. Wilder's book, the problem of refining our criteria for evaluation, is also raised by Hermann Hesse's *Demian*. Hesse is considered by the best German critics to be one of the greatest of living novelists as well as an outstanding lyric poet, and he won the Nobel prize for literature in 1946; yet he has not received anywhere near the critical recognition in this country that a writer of his stature could normally expect. The Nobel prize, which is responsible for the re-issue of *Demian* and the earlier re-publication of *Steppenwolf* (these are his only books available in English) has not done much to remove him from a position of dignified obscurity. There are, it seems to me, certain literary reasons for this apart from the inevitable happy-go-lucky attention that American publishers give to European writing; and it might be worth while bringing them up briefly before going on to discuss *Demian* itself.

Some writers are especially difficult to translate because the effect they create is based on a mastery of the nuances of their own language. Such a writer, for example, is Racine, completely insipid in English but an exquisite poet in French; another French writer of this kind is, in my opinion, André

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gide, whose international reputation is based far more on the sensational elements in his work than on an appreciation of its literary quality. On the other hand, writers of an intricate, elaborate and richly-orchestrated style, like Marcel Proust and Thomas Mann, come across more easily because their effects do not depend on linguistic subtleties of tone; they rely on images and metaphors that can be re-created in another language without too much difficulty. Hesse is a writer of the first type, who by a delicate play of verbal suggestion creates a poetic world of his own with the simplest of means; and he presents, consequently, a difficult translation problem—a problem certainly not solved by the present version of *Demian,* which, while accurate for the most part, does not capture Hesse's quality.

And coupled with this, there is perhaps an even more important difficulty. Hesse began as a writer of the *Heimatkunst* school, the German equivalent, roughly, of our "local color" realists; but *Demian,* if we are not mistaken, marks his break with naturalism and his development toward a literary form halfway between prose and poetry—a form, at any rate, certain to disconcert the American reader who comes to a "novel" with certain definite expectations in mind. Even a more sophisticated reader like P. M. Pasinetti, writing in *Sewanee Review* (Winter, 1948), complains of *Steppenwolf* that "Hesse does not desire his 'story'," and thinks with regret of the "realistic figure" that "could have emerged." Anyone who approaches Hesse with this attitude is sure to have Mr. Pasinetti's negative reaction; but then he must have the same reaction to some of the greatest writers in German literature, such as Hoffmann, Jean Paul and Novalis, all of whom wrote in this half-prose and half-poetic form, the closest approach to which in English is probably Poe—or even Herman Melville, to invoke a name which commands more critical respect. Thomas Mann, in his foreword to *Demian,* frankly calls it a "prose-poem," and this comes closer to describing the book and Hesse's later prose works in general than to call them novels.

These preliminary explanations will, we hope, make a well-intentioned reader of *Demian* think twice before estimating Hesse's achievement on the basis of a slovenly translation, and of critical standards that do not take into account the literary and cultural tradition from which Hesse comes. But what of *Demian* viewed in its own terms? The book, quite apart from its ultimate esthetic value, has a place in the history of modern German literature much like that of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* in our own; for as Thomas Mann explains, Demian "called forth grateful rapture from a whole youthful generation," the "lost generation" of the German post-war period, just as Hemingway's book crystallized the consciousness of that same generation in this country. But to pursue the parallel one step further, it is precisely this element of timeliness, responsible for the great success and influence of both

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

books, that now dates certain portions of them, although it is far from relegating either to an exclusively historical interest.

The theme of *Demian* is stated in a sentence printed as epigraph: "I want only to try to live in obedience to the promptings which come from my true self. Why was that so difficult?" The narrator of the story, Emil Sinclair, thus goes in quest of his true self—a quest whose levels are symbolized by reinterpretations of Biblical myths (much as Kierkegaard used the Abraham myth for his own literary purposes in *Fear and Trembling*), dreams, visions, automatic paintings that express subconscious desires, mysterious messages and other romantic paraphernalia; but in the original, at any rate, these elements are accepted without question because Hesse submerges them in the enchanted fairy tale atmosphere of the German *Märchen*. Sinclair's efforts to break free from his home and to come to terms with his sexual desires are tactfully furthered by Demian, a mysterious, commanding, self-possessed youth with some strange inward power, who tells Sinclair that Cain's children, the outcasts, were really "people with courage and character," who "are always called peculiar by other people." And by taking an ironic view of the Biblical story of the honest thief, who repented on the Cross, Demian leads Sinclair to understand that conventional Christianity only has a place for the "good, noble, fatherly, beautiful, sublime and sentimental," but not for that aspect of life which, like Sinclair's dawning sex, belongs to "the suppressed devil's world." Sinclair then realizes that "my own idea, my own myth, the idea of two worlds or two halves of the world—the light and the dark," was also "a problem of humanity as a whole." Sinclair's quest for himself becomes the problem of "uniting the divine and the diabolical," of creating a new religion—in his own personal experience, not by sewing together scraps of antiquated mythologies—that would satisfy this need.

Sinclair's career oscillates in a seesaw pattern between these two poles of his being, both of which belonged to his true self, without either, in isolation, being that true self in its entirety. After periods of debauchery and asceticism, of intellectual exploration and sensuous self-expression, Sinclair finds the symbol of his integration in Mother Eve—obviously a fertility image —who is Demian's mother and the center of a circle of souls like Sinclair, all in quest of spiritual integration. The relationship between Sinclair and Mother Eve remains quite ambiguous; and it is at this point, in my opinion, that the book definitely falls off. Sinclair's integration is presumably accomplished by Mother Eve, for whom, naturally, he feels a strong sexual attraction; but just at the point where the physical and spiritual are finally to be fused, the war enters as a *deux ex machina* to prevent final fulfillment. Mother Eve, therefore, fails to be convincing in terms of the symbolic conflicts that Hesse himself has set up; and this evasion seems to me a tacit recognition, on Hesse's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

part, that the whole conception of Mother Eve was not complex enough for the role assigned her. In addition, the entrance of the war dissolves the poetic world that Hesse has created, and makes the fairytale tonality in the later pages of the book unconvincing. This tonality is no longer linked up solely with symbolic inner conflicts, but is used in relation to an historical event that cannot be treated in its terms, and in the light of which it seems somewhat frivolous.

The poles of the basic conflict that Hesse adumbrates in *Demian* run all through his later work; in these he has unquestionably created richer and profounder symbolic embodiments for them. But *Demian* is an indispensable introduction to the fascinating and frightening world of a great modern writer who has not been afraid to "glance into chaos" (the title of one of his books); and this world is, at the same time, the conflict-ridden and dualism-haunted world of European man in the twentieth century.

One of the few American writers occupied with the eternal dialectic of good and evil at a spiritual depth comparable to Hesse's is Robert Penn Warren. Mr. Warren has already given us a measure of his ability to vivify that dialectic artistically, and in terms of the American experience, in *All The King's Men*, certainly one of the most impressive achievements in recent American writing. With the exception of the title story, the short stories in *The Circus in the Attic* were all written before this last novel; and so, while they enable us to follow the progress of Mr. Warren's mastery as a prose artist, they do not enlighten us on the direction which this powerful and versatile talent will take in the future. Even the title story, one would venture to guess, is not a newly-created piece but the reworking of some earlier fragment that had never been completed.

In thinking over the impression left by these stories, a curious phenomenon struck me: that those most successful as stories, as isolated, individually rounded wholes, seemed far less rich and far thinner in texture and tension than those which appeared to be either fragments of some larger pattern, or embryonic novels sketchily treated and bursting the seams of the short story form. Examples of the first type, the successful story, are "Blackberry Winter," "Her Own People" and "Christmas Gift"; of the second type, the two stories in which Elsie Barton appears seem fragments of a larger whole; the title story is a novel in miniature—and consequently an unsuccessful short story—just as is "Prime Leaf," which actually served as the kernel of Mr. Warren's excellent first novel *Night Rider*. This disparity in quality, so paradoxical at first view, seems to me an indication that Mr. Warren's imagination is not at home within the confines of the "well-made" short story, and that his particular perception of character requires an amplitude that he has not yet been able to reconcile with the terseness and concentration of the short story form.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The level at which Mr. Warren conceives character is well expressed in a passage from "The Circus in the Attic":

> The man, Simon Lovehart, moves with his eyes fixed down the street, as though unaware of his companions and of the street itself. He is, however, aware of them at times, in the middle of the night or on the spring street, aware of the powerful, vibrating, multitudinous web of life which binds the woman and child together, victor and victim (but which is which? he asks himself: is the present the victim of the past, or the past the victim of the present?), and when he is aware of that web and the million dark, pulsing tentacles, he feels that he stands at the end of something, on a promontory, lost, with a distant wind rushing somewhere in the night far behind him.

Mr. Warren, that is, has a profound sense of the million-fingered "web of life," no strand of which can really be disentangled from any other in the mysterious complex of human personality. In his most successful character creations, Mr. Warren broods over this web until he is able to give the reader an overpowering impression both of the singularity and unexpectedness of the events it precipitates, and yet of the inexorable fatality involved in their accomplishment. But to give us this sense, Mr. Warren has to weave a considerably larger web than the short story form allows; and when he does not bother to weave the web at all, as in many of the stories in this book, he writes either trivial *New Yorker* and *Mademoiselle* pieces, or stories which, while craftsmanlike jobs, do not have the quality of imagination we have tried to define, and which distinguishes Mr. Warren at his best.

In an article written as far back as 1934 on the social novelist T. S. Stribling, Mr. Warren explained this conception of character himself, attributing it to "Faulkner and a considerable group of the younger Southern novelists." Stribling, he said, made "the novel a device for communication, that is, a device for illustration. The author 'intellectualizes' his perceptions so that their vitality is forfeited. The work approaches allegory." But the young Southern writers, Mr. Warren continued, "are interested in putting, so far as their powers permit, the question about the destiny of certain obscure individuals, their characters, so that the question will remain alive." This approach is that "of passionate, yet disinterested and patient, contemplation"; "it is a contemplation rooted in the poetic attitude." Peter Taylor, whose first book of short stories, *The Long Fourth,* has a preface by Mr. Warren, is clearly a young Southern writer who has grown up in this tradition, and whose defects and merits can best be understood in its terms.

Mr. Taylor, according to Mr. Warren in his foreword, "hesitates to impose [himself] on the material and to organize a story like a theorem." His stories, as a result, have none of the empty competence of most current writ-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing; he is striving to give us character, which is—or should be—the fiction writer's primary job, and this is one of the beneficent effects of the tradition Mr. Taylor is working in. But at the same time, a successful short story must have a cumulative impact of some kind, and a collection of character sketches, however interesting, is not enough to make a story. Mr. Taylor's stories, we are afraid, have the defect of their virtues: they tend to fall apart into a series of individual sketches, for the total meaning of the work is usually so tenuous that the reader has to impose it conceptually after reading, rather than having the meaning impose itself on him irresistibly as an esthetic perception.

As Mr. Warren notes, the material of these stories is culled from "the smaller collisions and crises of life," with, in the background, "the old-fashioned structure of [Southern] family life disintegrating slowly under the pressures of modernity." Mr. Taylor's difficulty is in bringing his background and his foreground together, in giving "the smaller collisions and crises of life" the larger implication that would provide the series of minor social shocks in each story with an underlying structural support. As it is, in all but two of the stories, Mr. Taylor underplays his hand so determinedly that no background emerges on which the acutely perceived details of character can come together with any cumulative force. In "The Fancy Woman" and particularly in "The Long Fourth," Mr. Taylor, while not completely successful, manages to bring these two elements together in a better balance, and gives a hint of what he may be capable of as he develops.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED